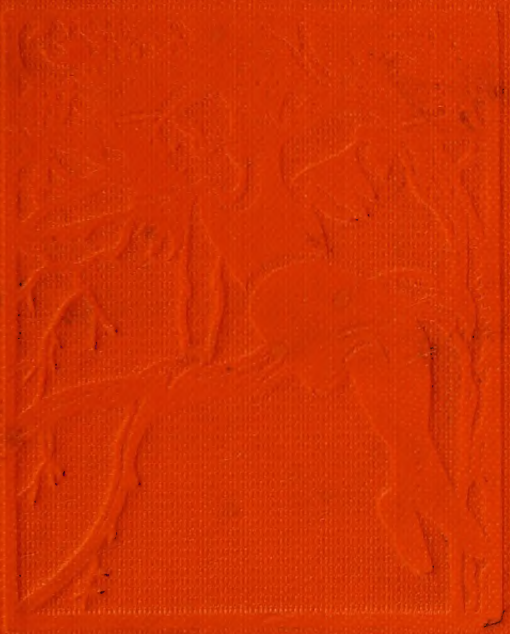
SALLY COCKSURE



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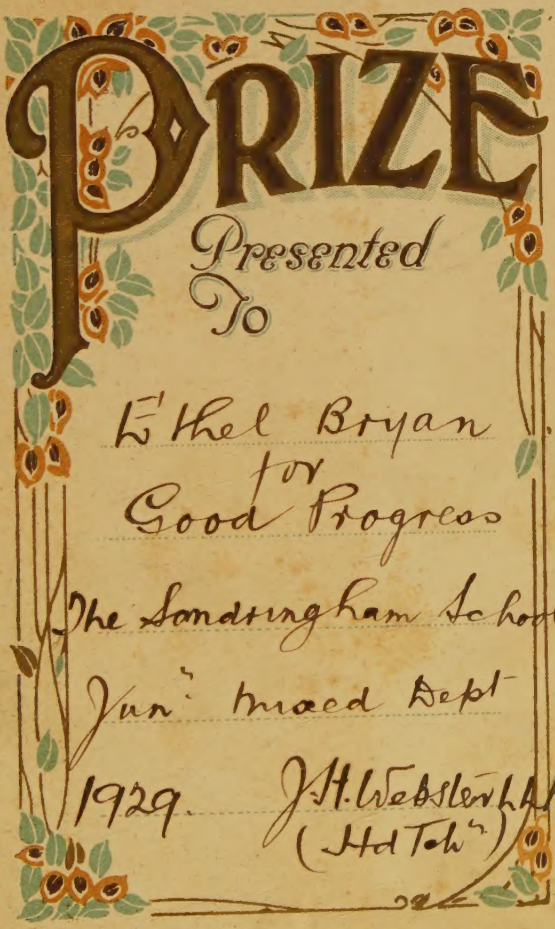

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SALLY FOUND HERSELF CLASPING THE DOOR OF THE NEXT CARRIAGE

(*See page* 20.)

SALLY COCKSURE

A SCHOOL STORY

By IERNE L. PLUNKET

ILLUSTRATED BY GORDON BROWNE

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Sally at Home	5
II.	On the Way to School	14
III.	Unpopularity	21
IV.	A Cold Shoulder	28
V.	Sally is Taken Up	34
VI.	An Escapade	40
VII.	Penalties	48
VIII.	A Rift in the Lute	55
IX.	A Broad Hint	61
X.	The Breach Widens	68
XI.	A Night Adventure	75
XII.	Sally at the Fair	83
XIII.	"Just Silliness"	91
XIV.	Autolycus	100
XV.	Will she Come?	106
XVI.	Disillusionment	113
XVII.	The New Term	121
XVIII.	The Blotted Essay	127
XIX.	Mischief	135
XX.	Games and Toffee	142
XXI.	Autolycus Gives Trouble	150
XXII.	Autolycus is Lost	159
XXIII.	The Portholes	166
XXIV.	Reconciliation	174
XXV.	Rescue.	181

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Sally found herself clasping the door of the next carriage (see page 20) . . *Frontispiece*

Sally felt herself swung off her feet . . *page* 49

"'Ware Castle!" . . . . . ,, 79

The policeman pursued for a few yards . ,, 89

"Hi! Hi!" she screamed excitedly . . ,, 183

CHAPTER THE FIRST

SALLY AT HOME

THE hall-door bell rang violently. Sally Brendan, seated on the schoolroom hearthrug with a volume of Shakespeare on her knees, gave an expressive whistle and, dropping the book, ran to the window and leaned out as far as she could without losing her balance. In this way it was just possible to catch a glimpse of the front-door steps.

"Mrs. Musgrave! I guessed as much," she said, her head reappearing at last. "I can tell you one thing, St. Martin, she is in a thundering temper."

Her governess sighed. "You have no reason to say that, Sally: and at any rate this is lesson-time, and Mrs. Musgrave's call is intended for your mother. It has nothing to do with you."

"Hasn't it, though? Bet you a bob it has; and, as to her temper, vicars' wives are worse than most people because they have to keep them under so much. You should have seen her umbrella almost jumping in her hand with rage, and then the bell! You heard it yourself, and you can't deny it was like the noise telegraph boys make; and . . ."

"Sally, I must insist that you sit down and don't talk any more."

With a grunt Sally flopped on to the hearthrug, where she placed her ear to the floor, scout fashion, before re-opening her Shakespeare.

"Only wish I could hear through a carpet," she muttered discontentedly. "Bet your life she has come to tick me off to Mother. She looked mad, just like a cow that sees red."

Sally was quite right about Mrs. Musgrave's temper. The vicar's wife was very angry indeed. With a curt "No," she waved aside a cup of tea and declined a chair, striding the length of the drawing-room and back before she came to a halt beside Mrs. Brendan.

"Tell me whose writing this is! Be honest, Eva!" she demanded, tapping a square of white cardboard that she placed in the other's hands. On the cardboard was scrawled in pencil, between inverted commas,

"Two are Company."

"It . . . it looks like Sally's writing," said Mrs. Brendan unhappily. "What do you say, Cecilia?"

A tall fair girl who had been standing by the tea-tray came over, picked up the card, and throwing it down impatiently answered, "It is Sally's writing, of course. What has she been doing now, Mrs. Musgrave?"

The vicar's wife almost choked as she said, "Insulting my husband, making him the laughing-stock of the parish. She is a wicked, unnatural girl."

"No, no; not unnatural or wicked," murmured Mrs. Brendan deprecatingly. "High-spirited, too high-spirited now and then, I admit, but she is so clever."

"I am glad no one ever called *my* daughters clever then." Mrs. Musgrave's voice rose almost to a shriek. "Cleverness of that sort is criminal and will only lead to prison."

"Of what sort?" asked Cecilia. "Do tell us, Mrs. Musgrave."

The vicar's wife glared at them both almost as if she did not see them, then sank down on the sofa.

"You know our weekly lectures under the Diocesan Mental Improvement Scheme?" she said. "I mean my husband's lectures in the Parish Room on Fridays. They are not well attended, but so few people care to improve their minds nowadays."

"Cecilia has a singing class in Clinton," interposed Mrs. Brendan hastily; "it is the only day Signor Corsi can run down from town, and I have been so tired lately, the doctor said 'Rest in the afternoons.' He did, didn't he, Cecilia?"

"Everyone has some reasons for not going, of course," said Mrs. Musgrave sourly. "I did not come to criticise

yours. I have no doubt that if you and Cecilia are busy, for others Herbert's learning is too profound, too out of date in this respect, to please a superficial younger generation. Last Friday, at any rate, it was raining; raining quite heavily."

Mrs. Brendan's face brightened. "That was it, Alice. I remember I had my boots on intending to go out and then it rained and Cecilia said 'Don't go.' No, I forgot, Cecilia was in Clinton, so it must have been Amy, the housemaid. She takes such care of me."

"Indeed!" Mrs. Musgrave thrust out a hand for silence. "Your going or not is beside the point, Eva, and I must beg you to let me speak without interrupting me. As a matter of fact I had a cold and did not attend myself. When Herbert reached the room there was no one there at all except . . . except . . ."

"Except . . .?" said Mrs. Brendan agitatedly. Surely Sally, unless dragged by force, would not have gone to a lecture on the Cuneiform Writings of Ancient Babylon?

"Except a goat," said Mrs. Musgrave slowly and impressively; "an evil-smelling goat of Farmer Reed's, tied to the front row of chairs."

"And . . . and you mean it had this round its neck?" asked Cecilia pointing to the card, with its mocking "Two are Company."

In spite of heroic efforts her voice trembled with laughter, and Mrs. Musgrave bounced up from the sofa, pointing her finger at her.

"Laugh!" she said. "Laugh if you can, thoughtless girl, but your sister, by her rudeness, her cleverness if you will, has undone years of Herbert's patient work in the parish. Some of the choir boys were peering through the window, giggling, and as he returned home they dared to call out 'Giddy Goat' after him down the street. 'Giddy Goat!' Think of it! To Herbert." At this point she collapsed on the sofa and began to weep.

"I . . . I didn't mean to laugh. It was horrible of Sally,"

said Cecilia, conscience-stricken, while Mrs. Brendan went over and laid her hand on Mrs. Musgrave's shoulder.

"We have been friends for years, Alice," she said. "Don't let this come between us. I am ashamed of Sally."

"You have cause to be. You will have more cause," said the vicar's wife bitterly between her sobs. "She is a dreadful child, without heart or conscience."

"She is my daughter, Alice, so I can hardly agree with you," interrupted Mrs. Brendan, in what, considering her mild temperament, was almost the heat of anger. "Sally has plenty of heart, but she is thoughtless."

"She is thoroughly spoilt, Mother," broke in Cecilia; "first while you were in India, by Uncle Frank and Aunt Antoinette, and now at home. I am sure we owe it to Mrs. Musgrave to acknowledge this. Sally is just a spoilt little beast."

"Thoroughly spoilt and selfish," agreed their visitor, drying her eyes and beginning to pull on her gloves. "All I can say is, Eva, that if Sally remains in Hartcombe Vale and is allowed to break away from her governess and play tricks like a street urchin, I shall consider it a direct insult to Herbert."

"I will speak to her, of course," murmured Mrs. Brendan, and Mrs. Musgrave, now standing by the door, laughed scornfully.

"You mean, my dear Eva, that Sally will speak to you, and will prove in a few brief words how right and correct —clever and high-spirited, I should say—her conduct has been. No, Cecilia, do not interrupt me. I owe it to Herbert and the parish to enter my protest at least."

At this moment violent sounds were heard overhead, the crash of something heavy on the floor, a scream, more things falling, and then a girl's clear, ringing laugh.

"The schoolroom, I believe?" said Mrs. Musgrave, "and another exhibition of Sally's high-spirited cleverness, I suppose?"

As she opened the door she sniffed and shrugged her

shoulders. "Let me see you off," returned Cecilia coldly. She was very angry at the way their visitor had spoken to her mother, the more that she felt the underlying reproach was true. Sally was an odious child. There was no use blinking the fact.

In the hall Mrs. Musgrave bade her come no further. "I am quite capable of seeing myself off; besides, I might be tempted to say more than I should wish in my last words." After which she added, "It seems you are needed to restore order in the schoolroom."

To judge from the continuous noise upstairs, loud laughter mingled with the barking of an excited dog, this was likely to be true.

"Oh, St. Martin!" rang out a girl's voice. "What rotten bad luck! but I can't stop laughing; you do look so funny."

At this point Mrs. Musgrave closed the front door, and Cecilia, rage in her heart, ran up the stairs two at a time.

In the schoolroom she found even greater chaos than she had expected—a bare table, an inkpot emptying itself amongst a heap of books in the grate, and on the floor someone struggling wildly to free herself from the tablecloth, while a fox terrier plunged at her protruding feet.

"Oh, mighty Cæsar! Dost thou lie so low?" chanted a small, thin girl with a mass of red hair framing her freckled face; as, seeing her sister, she drew herself up into a theatrical attitude and pointed to the recumbent figure.

Cecilia told her sharply to be quiet, and having turned the fox terrier out of the room, knelt down and extricated the governess; but when she tried to help her to her feet Miss Martin refused to do more than struggle into a sitting posture.

"Will you kindly ask Sally to bring me scissors?" she said, her voice trembling, and the tears rolling down her cheeks. "She has sewn my skirt to the carpet."

"Sally!"

Cecilia's eyes blazed, but Sally only laughed. "She had

been reading to me, yards and yards of Shakespeare, and I was fed up, so I said I would only listen if I might sit on the rug, so St. Martin said, 'Right oh.'"

"I never said 'Right oh'," exclaimed the scandalised Miss Martin. "I said you might remain there if you were quiet."

"Well, I was quiet, once I found the darning wool, and St. Martin has such a long skirt that I button-holed her down by it, and then when Mary came to say tea was ready in the dining-room I truly and honest Injun forgot I had done so and . . ."

"And I rose from my chair," said Miss Martin, "and I put my foot into my skirt and . . ."

"It was a mistake to clutch at the tablecloth as you fell, all the same," interposed Sally gravely. "I simply shouted, 'Don't clutch,' and you clutched, and there you are."

"Sally, go to your bedroom," said Cecilia sharply, as she cut the darning wool and pulled the governess on to her feet. "Miss Martin, I am so sorry; it was abominable of her."

"It was unpardonable," said Miss Martin, pulling the frayed ends of wool out of her skirt with trembling fingers. "I am afraid I must ask to see your mother at once, Miss Brendan."

"You mean you won't come back again?"

Sally was still standing in the doorway.

"I do mean that. It is impossible to teach you anything."

"Sally, did you hear me say go to your bedroom?" broke in Cecilia impatiently, but the girl still lingered.

"Let me speak to St. Martin alone," she said.

Miss Martin shook her head. "I have no wish to do that, Sally. It is too late if you think an apology can cover all your rudeness; and now, Miss Brendan, may I see your mother?"

As they went downstairs together Sally watched them from the landing, a derisive smile at the corner of her lips,

that marked, however, a certain regret. It was a pity that St. Martin insisted on going. Of course, she wept too easily, but all the same she was a bit of a sport, and had forgiven and forgotten many little scenes scarcely to her pupil's credit. In addition, she had always admitted that Sally was clever, and Sally liked people who were ready to do this.

"Clever people aren't like other people; they have got to have outlets for their energy and originality," was her argument for silencing various twinges of conscience; and she at once put it forward when Mrs. Brendan sent for her to the drawing-room as soon as Miss Martin had gone home.

Cecilia was there to strengthen her mother, and said angrily, "If only you didn't think yourself so clever."

"Know—not think," said Sally sweetly. It was no use losing your temper with a sugar-plum like Cecilia.

"I am so clever you know, frightfully clever," she continued, "and Miss Martin was such an ass, quite a nice ass, of course, not a goat like the vicar and his double."

This diverted the conversation from the schoolroom to the lecture, and as Sally recorded afterwards in her diary, "The floodgates opened," but even Cecilia admitted that the ensuing deluge fell like water off a duck's back where the culprit was concerned.

"I really truly am sorry if I made Mrs. Musgrave horrid to you," was the nearest confession to which the sinner could be won; and when she had been sent to bed, and carried off a choice of library books for company, Mrs. Brendan admitted that this was not enough.

"She will have to apologise to Mrs. Musgrave and Miss Martin, Cecilia. I must talk to her alone to-morrow."

"She will have to be sent away," returned the elder sister. "I was at school at thirteen, and why not Sally, who is nearly fourteen?"

"She is the youngest," said Mrs. Brendan weakly, "and you know she has been away from me so much."

"I admit Aunt Antoinette did her no good, except to

teach her French, and as to Uncle Frank, why you ever left her with them like that for months and months on end I can't imagine."

"You see, your Uncle Frank was so devoted to her as a small child, while your father and I were still in India, and then when your father died and I came back he wanted to keep her, and as I had you and the two boys, and he had been so good to Sally, I didn't like to refuse. I fear I did wrong, however, very wrong; I am sorry now."

Mrs. Brendan usually repented of the few decisions she was prevailed upon to make, and now she shook her head sadly.

Cecilia laughed somewhat maliciously. "Uncle Frank was sorry too. He had enough of her after a bit, and packed her off home."

"My dear, that is ungenerous. It was not till his boy was born, remember, and then there would have been the difficulty of maintaining a nursery and a schoolroom at the same time, as Sally was nearly eleven. He always said she was clever and offered to pay for her education."

"He said, 'Send her to school,' didn't he?"

Mrs. Brendan was silent. This was perfectly true. She could remember her brother-in-law's face quite well when he gave this advice.

"School will do her a world of good, teach her to find her own level, you know," he had said, and when Mrs. Brendan had asked anxiously, "You think her clever?" he had answered:

"Abominably, the makings of a first-class prig, and may I be forgiven for training her."

Undoubtedly Uncle Frank was right. Sally was clever beyond the average girl of her age both in games and work, fearless and quick, with a boundless ambition that made her strain every nerve to excel in whatever she undertook.

"Let me; I can do it," had been her earliest watchword, and a proud uncle had delighted in the pluck and endurance that had backed this assertion.

"All right, kiddie, I will show you," he would say good-naturedly, whether it was a case of arithmetic or cricket, and so put Sally through a strenuous and valuable apprenticeship.

"That child will get somewhere," he would say delightedly, while Aunt Antoinette, who was earlier disillusioned as to her spoilt niece's charms, shrugged, and murmured:

"It may be . . . yes . . . but I ask you . . . where?"

By the time Sally was thirteen her elder sister had no doubts at all as to her future destination.

"It will be a reformatory, Mother. Either we must take steps to discipline her, or the magistrates will, and we shall all be disgraced. There's nothing but school. You won't get another governess who will be an angel like Miss Martin."

"She never knew how to manage Sally."

"You can't manage a wild cat except by shutting it up, and Sally is about as easy to control."

"She is so like her father." Mrs. Brendan sighed, then added hastily, in an attempt to appease Cecilia's angry silence, "I mean she always knows her own mind. He did, you know. It has been such a responsibility without him."

Still there was silence, and the elder woman, feeling its weight and intensity, yielded at last.

"Oh, very well, my dear. I expect you are right. She shall go to school."

"Seascape House, next term, the summer one, and you must tell her she will jolly well have to stop."

"Of course!" said Mrs. Brendan, "of course," but she looked troubled.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL

"I SHAN'T stop at school a minute longer than I want."

Sally was saying good-bye to Mrs. Brendan, and that good lady could only find courage at the minute to murmur:

"But, my dear, of course you will remain. I beg you, Sally."

There were tears in her eyes, and the girl answered gruffly, but so low that Cecilia in the doorway could not hear, "All right. I'll try, Mum."

Then she threw her arms round her mother's neck, gave her a wild hug, and joined Cecilia in the hall, laughing rather loud as she banged the drawing-room door behind her.

"You will have to be quieter at Seascape House, Sally."

"Shall I?"

"I should hope so. Why, the prefects will turn you down at once for that."

"Blow the prefects, and blow their doors tight too!"

Cecilia smiled, offensively Sally considered, as she clambered into the taxi beside her.

"Hang the whole lot of superior idiots to weeping willow trees for all I care," she persisted. "You needn't think I'm going to let school or prefects upset me."

"You are so sure, cocksure even, on things you don't know anything about, aren't you?"

"I am usually right, you see. I don't care what anybody says, so they can't worry me."

"Oh, shut up and don't be silly, Sally."

"Shut up yourself."

The quarrels between the sisters, frequent in spite of Cecilia's good temper, usually degenerated into a kind of puppy's barking, and then trailed off into silence. Now the two sat moodily while the local train crawled from Hartcombe to Clinton, and there disgorged its passengers.

"We should see Violet Tremson here," said Cecilia at last, breaking the silence. "I wonder if she is one of that group. They all have the Seascape House hatband."

"I don't want to see her. Mrs. Musgrave's pet lambs are not in my line."

Now Mrs. Musgrave, repenting of some of her animosity towards Sally as soon as she heard that she was really being sent to school, had recalled the existence of a young cousin at Seascape House.

"Of course, Violet is older than you—fifteen, I think—but such a nice quiet girl, and so clever, without being affected."

It had been an unfortunate recommendation, and Sally had merely scowled in response. Whoever she chose as her friend she was determined from that minute it should not be Violet Tremson.

"Beastly sort of prig. Mother's darling business, I expect." She had discouraged Mrs. Brendan when the latter suggested asking Violet over from Clinton during the Easter holidays, and now she said sharply to her sister:

"Look here, I'm not going near that lot, they've got a mistress with them."

Hurriedly grasping up her new yellow-brown suit-case, she led the way along the platform, and tumbled into a carriage already containing five girls. Four of them were established in the corners, but seeing the grown-up Cecilia with a foot on the step, one of them politely moved. "Are you coming in?" she asked.

Now was Sally's opportunity to show off before the sister who declared she would be awed by the inmates of Seascape House as soon as she came in contact with them.

"No, she's not, but I am, thank you," and she coolly took the corner seat.

There was hushed silence in the carriage while the girls stared at her round-eyed, and Cecilia blushed at her impudence.

"You needn't stop, Cissy; I'm all right."

Sally's voice was as calm and even as usual, but she was glad when Cecilia took her at her word, and with a doubtful glance at the five said, "I do hope you will be all right," and vanished.

"Oh, my Empress of India!" said one of the girls rather shrilly, and the others giggled; they were about Sally's size, a healthy, cheerful-looking set, and they stared at her as though she were an interesting object from the Zoo.

"Shall we shift it?" demanded another, edging near the new girl; but at this minute, when Sally was preparing to defend her corner with tooth and nail, a distraction arose.

"Olive's going to be left behind. There's Proggins trying to shove her in, and the guard with the whistle to his lips."

"Proggins ought to be in here, herding us."

"She'll have to sprint then. Good old Proggins."

"Oh, hurrah! Olive has seen us. Come on, Olive."

All the five, leaning out of the window or kneeling up with their faces to the glass, yelled aloud; then cheered as a dark-haired girl of fourteen tumbled into the carriage, hatless.

Squeezed in her corner, Sally could see the mistress, evidently the so-called "Proggins," fumbling for Olive's dropped hat and umbrella. She retrieved them and made a run towards their carriage, but the train had already begun to move, and the guard, opening a door further back, unceremoniously pushed her in and banged it.

The six burst into uproarious mirth.

"Good old Proggins; not quite her centre forward style, I think?"

"A bit slow on the ball," said Olive, throwing herself back on the seat beside Sally and fanning herself with a newspaper. "Anyhow, it wasn't a good pass on my part. School hats aren't weighted right."

"She'll be jolly mad with you when we get to Parchester."

"Sufficient unto the day . . ." and then Olive stopped and began to stare at Sally.

"A new kid," she said, "with a head like a golliwog illumined by a sunset. My child, yours is not the tidy sort of poll we expect at Seascape House, especially on Sundays. Old Cocaine will put a tax on it."

Sally raised her eyebrows, then opened her magazine with a yawn. "Is your hair generally admired?" she asked. "It looks painted on like a wooden doll's."

This pleasantry was received in dumbfounded silence. If Sally intended to make a sensation she had undoubtedly succeeded, and smiled to herself at the result. It was one of her maxims to carry war into the enemy's country on the least provocation.

Now there was a pause, suspended hostilities, while the six whispered in corners. Olive was being told of the new girl's dramatic entry into the carriage; so much Sally could guess from her round-eyed stare and the agitated way in which she ran her fingers across her dark, smooth-clipped head.

"What's your name?" she demanded.

"Sarah Brendan."

"And your age?"

"Thirteen and a half."

Sally was proud of this, for she knew she had done very well in her entrance examination, so well that even Cecilia had gasped. It amused her now to see the looks of satisfaction on the faces of the six, especially when Olive said languidly:

"Quite a small kid, which accounts for your lack of manners. We shall have to teach you."

"I fear you will hardly be in that position."

"What do you mean?"

"That we are not likely to be in the same form, or are you all mistresses?"

"We are all 'Lower Fourth' here except Susy, who is in the 'Upper Fourth.'"

"Exactly." Sally smiled; it was an offensive smile and led the girl called Olive to seize her magazine out of her hand and throw it on the floor.

"You horrid little scrub!" she said. "What are you driving at?"

"That I am in the Remove—which is above the Fourths, isn't it?—and so I am not likely to see much of you children. As to your manners, give me back that *Pearson's*."

"Get it yourself."

Taken unwarily, Sally bent down to do so and found herself pitching forward on her nose, while with a shout of delight Olive seated herself in the corner. It was dirty on the floor, and Sally's temper was in shreds by the time she had picked herself up.

"Move at once, you beast," she said, her face white with passion; but unlike her family, who had been taught by Mrs. Brendan to propitiate rather than exasperate her when in one of her black moods, the six girls crowed with joy at her discomfort.

"Go and wash your face, darling," cried one; and another: "Here's a seat," pulling at Sally roughly and then sliding across the vacant place before she could sit down.

For the next ten minutes pandemonium reigned, and for once, though she was undoubtedly the cause, Sally had not created it for her own pleasure. The tears rose to her eyes, but at the general offer of handkerchiefs and a bucket she forced them back.

"I'll make you pay, you horrid little beasts," she said, clenching her hands on the ledge of the open window behind her, but the threat only evoked shouts of: "For she's a jolly smart fellow," to which the accompaniment was a tattoo of as many feet as could reach the new suit-case.

"Its mother won't know it soon," said Olive, examining the no longer shiny surface, when the singers at last paused, exhausted.

"You have nearly knocked a hole in it. I shall tell Miss Cockran." Sally's voice trembled with rage.

"If you do, you will be a dirty little sneak, and sent to Coventry by the whole school."

"I don't care."

There was more laughter, and once more the six began to sing, and Sally hated them while she stood there helpless, the more that they seemed to have forgotten her very existence.

"Will you leave my suit-case alone? and give me back my seat?"

She pulled at Olive's sleeve, but though she repeated her questions twice that young lady only looked at her lazily and laughed.

"In both cases the answer is in the negative," she returned and, leaning back, closed her eyes.

"Very well," said Sally quietly. Her anger had died down into a cool fury that was none the less intense, yet what could she do? She looked out of the carriage window and realised from other journeys that the train was nearing Southampton, and Southampton was the first stop after Clinton. She could, of course, get out there, but the exit would be undignified, and in imagination she could hear her tormentors laugh, and see them kiss their hands to her in exultant farewell at her discomfiture.

Now Sally liked her entrances and exits to be dramatic, not undignified, and in a flash of inspiration the suggestion of how to achieve this came. Just before Southampton there was a tunnel, and when the train plunged into it, while everyone's eyes were growing accustomed to the gloom, she would open the door and step along the footboard to the next carriage.

"That will give them a fright," she said grimly to herself, and as usual did not pause to consider her own folly in risking her life for a matter of wounded pride. Besides, she was used to climbing and had once played follow my leader with her brothers on a local train to the same tune.

With a shriek the train plunged into the tunnel, and Sally, whose fingers had been clasped on the handle, slid open the door and felt for the step; the next minute she was swinging on the footboard, while the hot air beat her

face and blew her mop of hair across her eyes. Her hat she had lost on the floor during her struggle in the carriage.

As the train emerged once more into the day, with a glint of sunlight across the harbour, Sally found herself clasping the door of the next carriage while a girl, leaning out, grasped her by the shoulders.

"You young fool; what made you do such a thing?"

There was a group round Sally now on the platform, including Proggins, her face deathly white, and all the elder girls from neighbouring carriages; above their heads she could see the anxious expressions of her fellow travellers of the Fourths. Certainly she had impressed them.

"Why did I do it?" she said jauntily, and in a loud voice. "Why, I couldn't get a decent seat where I was, and it was so stuffy."

At this a few of her audience laughed, though some merely stared, while Proggins grasped her firmly by the shoulder.

"You will sit with me," she said.

"May I have my suit-case and magazine, if you have quite finished with them?"

This was the moment of Sally's triumph, for as she turned and looked up at Olive the latter meekly handed down her property through the open window with never a gibe or scowl.

"I said to Cecilia that I could look after myself," the new girl complacently told herself, as she settled down to read. She was not unconscious that her companions, including Proggins, were regarding her with curiosity.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

UNPOPULARITY

SALLY BRENDAN ended her first week in the Remove at the top of the form. What was more, she kept her place there easily during the ensuing three, to the disgust of her nearest rival, the fifteen-year-old Dorothy Baker.

"Never mind, I shall be out of your way in the Lower Fifth next term," said Sally kindly, when the class list was read. The effect of these words was naturally far from soothing.

"Oh, go and put your head in your desk; I didn't ask you to patronise me," was the furious response, but Sally only laughed.

What was the use of propitiating these silly rabbits, as she had christened her present form companions, any more than the kids of the Lower Fourth who had teased her in the railway carriage? With the Lower Fifth, whom she soon expected to be her future classmates, it was different, and Sally would dearly have liked to make friends with one of their number at least, a dark-haired girl, Trina Morrison, nicknamed "Peter" by her intimates for reasons long forgotten.

"Peter" was rather old for the Lower Fifth, a lazy but far from stupid girl of seventeen, who spent much time and ingenuity annoying those in authority while her other talents ran to seed.

"School is such a bore," she would drawl to the group of her admirers. "It's really too silly, all these old rules; let's pitch some of them overboard!" and Sally, hovering on the outskirts, would laugh with the rest as some new evasion was expounded, and try to catch her idol's eye. So far she had not succeeded, though Peter, she felt sure, was one of those who had noticed the incident of the railway carriage.

This incident created quite a sensation for the moment

at Seascape House, though when Olive Parker's version of the affair was broadcast it had not tended to make the new girl popular.

"Cheeky little beast!" was the general opinion, chiming in with a prefect's comment, "Stupid little ass. She deserved to break her neck."

Thus the school as a whole decided to ignore the incident.

Only one girl mentioned it to Sally, and that more by way of introduction than in admiration or blame.

"I'm Violet Tremson," she said, coming up to Sally in the large playroom that evening. "I'm sorry you didn't have much of a time on the journey. I was keeping a place amongst our lot, but I didn't see you at Clinton."

"Thanks."

Sally, with remembrances of Mrs. Musgrave, spoke sulkily, though she could not help being attracted by the tall fair girl's friendly smile.

"I tried to wangle your sleeping in our dorm., but I don't seem to have succeeded."

"Oh, I shall be all right; I can sleep anywhere."

"That's good!" Violet Tremson was smiling broadly now and cast a hasty glance over her shoulder before she went on. "You see that fat girl over there, Pilladex we call her, because her name's Decima Pillditch?"

"The one with no eyebrows and pig's eyes?"

Violet Tremson stiffened slightly. "She's quite a good sort when she's awake, if she's not beautiful," she said a little resentfully, "and you'd better be careful, for she's Upper Fifth and in the running for a prefectship. Anyhow she is head of your dorm. and sleeps with her mouth open and snores; adenoids, I suppose."

"I shall put soap in her mouth," said Sally. "I did once to my brother Fred and he was frightfully sick."

"Well, I wouldn't try it on the Pilladex, if you want to lead a quiet life. You have never been at school before, I expect?"

"No, why on earth should I?"

Something in Violet Tremson's voice made Sally feel angry. It was almost like hinting, "You are barely out of long clothes"; and she added, "I know a good deal more than most schoolgirls I have met."

"Indeed? I hope you won't begin to lose intellectual ground here."

It was intolerable. This tall fair girl with her bland smile was actually laughing at her, and Sally hated laughter when she couldn't see the joke.

"Anyhow it's no business of yours," she said, and turning her back walked off.

Violet Tremson did not come near her again, and Sally told herself she was glad.

"A superior ass like any cousin of Mrs. Musgrave's was bound to be," she wrote to her mother, and scowled to think that the superior ass was in the Lower Fifth. "Of course, she's nearly fifteen," she added when she gave this information, but it did not make her feel much better.

These were bad days for Sally Brendan, almost a nightmare when she looked back on them afterwards, and only her half-muttered promise to her mother kept her from doing something outrageous that might lead to her being expelled.

"I'm unpopular just because I can do things, but I don't care," she wrote home, and secretly cared a great deal. Hitherto in her life she had mixed chiefly with grown-ups who spoiled her or tolerated her shortcomings because her daring amused them, and this latter had been the case with her schoolboy brothers.

"Sally is a regular sport," they would say, and forgive her vanity because she could bowl and swim and climb, was never afraid, nor complained when she was hurt. Younger children too had been willing to take a daring leader at her own valuation, and it was only now when she was brought into contact with numbers of girls of her own age that Sally realised she could be seen and not admired, also that her wit might fail to hit so many targets.

In school hours things were not so bad. Sally easily

kept her first place, enjoyed her lessons, and liked Miss Castle, her form mistress, who was always ready to help her and praise her work.

"Well done, Sally," she would say, pausing by the new girl's desk, and sometimes, "Why don't the rest of you use your brains like Sally Brendan?" Occasionally she found fault. "Don't be so certain you are right, remember pride before the fall; you are too cocksure," and this led to Sally's nickname in the form, "Miss Cocksure," and a rhyme chalked on the board one morning before school:

"Miss Cocksure
Is a bore,
I'm quite sure
She won't score."

"Won't I just?" muttered Sally to herself and smiled calmly on the class, as calmly as Miss Castle told the girl nearest to the board to clean it, before the literature lesson began.

"They are jealous because she likes me," was Sally's inward conviction, and there was some truth in this. It was the fashion in the middle forms of Seascape House to "adore" Miss Castle because she was young, rather pretty, very friendly, and could read poetry aloud with just the right amount of expression.

"Not woodenly like old Cheeserings (Miss Cheeseman) or pouring out yards of sob-stuff like Smutts (Miss Black)," was the general verdict, and when Miss Castle stage-managed Shakespeare plays there was dramatic fervour throughout the school.

Certainly it was annoying for the Remove that Miss Castle should accept this conceited new girl as one of their bright stars, give her principal parts in Shakespeare scenes, and read large portions of her essays aloud. That she might really like Sally for her hard work and enthusiasm, and most of all perhaps because she did not bore her with languishing glances and sentimental attentions, did not occur to Dorothy Baker or her friends.

"Horrid little cad," they denounced Sally, adding, "Won't we take it out of her in games!"

They did. The new girl was not even asked if she knew how to pitch a straight ball, but was sent to join the junior game.

"You had better be a Shrimp," said Miss Rogers (Proggins), the games mistress, who had not admired Sally's exploit on the train and thought she needed keeping in her place. She added sharply, "Go at once; Olive Parker will tell you what to do."

Olive, who was captain of the Shrimps (junior cricketers at Seascape House were divided into Shrimps and Sardines), was only too ready to undertake the task, though after the new girl had bowled her three times over in practice at the nets she did not give her the opportunity of doing so again.

"You'd better go out boundary or long stop," she would say, and yell at Sally to "Get a move on" or "Throw the ball up, can't you?" whenever she had the chance.

"You think yourself so jolly superior, don't you?" she said indignantly when the younger girl sulked, only to grow red with anger herself at the quick retort:

"I am superior to this sort of play anyway."

It was true, and Olive Parker knew it. She was being horribly unfair, but at the same time she and the rest of the juniors disliked Sally so much that she could not do anything right in their eyes.

When she had been batting one day and was bowled second ball (she usually made a very creditable score) there were cheers from all the Shrimps and derisive laughter. Sally had learned to make her face very wooden, but there were tears smarting under her lids as she walked back to the row of seats, ostentatiously filled up as she approached. No one spoke to her, though Edith Carter, a girl in the Upper Fourth, said something about "What price ducks' eggs?" and laughed. Then there was silence, and looking up Sally saw Miss Rogers standing beside her, and a big girl, Doris Forbes, the school captain.

"You don't generally get out so quick, do you?" asked Miss Rogers abruptly.

Sally shook her head. She could not trust herself to speak because of the lump in her throat.

"I thought not. You hold your bat well. Did your brothers teach you?"

"I have played a lot with them." Sally was beginning to recover. After being ignored so much, even casual interest was pleasant, but at this minute the last wicket fell and her side went out to field.

Sally was put boundary as usual, and except that Olive was less hectoring and more business-like owing to the presence of her exalted audience, the game dragged on its usual slow course.

Suddenly there was an interruption.

"Let Sally Brendan bowl now," called out Miss Rogers, and she walked across the pitch and began to umpire.

Sally felt her heart beat very fast, but she looked quite calm as she took her place behind the wickets and picked up the ball. She had had no practice lately in bowling, but her eye was good, and every nerve alert with the consciousness that now or never was her opportunity.

Her first ball, a fast one, went wide, her second pitched too short, but the third rooted Edith Carter's middle stump almost out of the ground.

"Now I've got the right length," said Sally to herself exulting, and the wickets began to fall rapidly before her onslaught.

"What I want to know, Olive Parker," said Miss Rogers as the last of the batting team withdrew with a scowl and a duck's egg, "is why you never mentioned Sally Brendan as a bowler when I asked you last week about any promising Shrimps?"

"Don't know!" muttered Olive sullenly.

"Hardly keeping your eyes open, was it?" suggested Doris Forbes, the cricket captain, and then Miss Rogers said decidedly:

"We'll talk about that afterwards, and you, Doris, settle what you like about Sally."

"Yes, Miss Rogers."

As the mistress turned away Doris beckoned to Sally. "You can come and bowl to me at the nets," she said.

Sally enjoyed the next half-hour more than any she had spent at Seascape House; not that her bowling remained unpunished, but that it aroused all her energy and skill. Soon she had forgotten the crowd round the nets and was absorbed in her task, not even hearing the school bell ring out seven o'clock till her batter called to her to stop.

"H'm! You're keen enough," said Doris Forbes.

"It's the first real play I have had since I have been here."

"All right, you can come and try your luck with the Eagles to-morrow," she said. "Now trot away."

Sally Brendan went back across the playing fields all alone, but for once unconscious of her isolation. She was to play with the Eagles, the group of senior cricketers from whom the first and second elevens were chosen, and Olive Parker and her Shrimps would torment her no longer. While she changed for supper visions of herself captaining the first eleven and telling everyone what to do passed before her eyes.

"I said I'd score," she laughed to herself triumphantly, and when Violet Tremson separated herself from the crowd in front of the dining-room door and congratulated her on her play at the nets she answered coolly:

"Oh, that's nothing. I never got a chance before at this place."

Some of the girls round sniggered, and Sally rather wished she hadn't been so lofty. After all, it was decent of Violet, who wasn't in the Eagles at all, but the middle sort of game of the Bears and Wolves.

"I'll give you some practice if you like," she added, and heard someone say:

"What frightful cheek! Leave the little bounder alone, Violet. Her head's been turned so that it's simply reeling."

It was Doreen Priestly, another of the Lower Fifth, whom Sally had secretly admired but henceforth hated. She had not meant to be superior in her offer, merely friendly, and though Violet answered quite gratefully: "Thanks. I'd like to but I'm no use at all at batting," she suspected secret laughter at her expense.

"Anyway, I'll be too busy for a bit," she said in a rough voice and pushed her way into the dining-room.

"What beasts they all are at Seascape House," she decided, "except, of course, Doris Forbes and Miss Rogers —oh, and Miss Castle!"

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

A COLD SHOULDER

By half term Sally had played with the Eagles for some weeks and won herself a place in the Second Eleven.

"I should be in the First, but that there is so much jealousy amongst the Seniors, who are a rotten lot," she wrote home to her mother; and Mrs. Brendan sighed as she read out this characteristic message to Cecilia, who said:

"Still as offensive as ever, it seems! I suppose her impudence is chronic now."

This was exactly the verdict of Seascape House, from Olive Parker, who was henceforth driven to satisfy her dislike of the new girl by muttered jeers in the passage, to Doris Forbes, the Sixth Form Cricket Captain.

"Look here, kid! If there is any more cheek on your part you will have to go back to the Shrimp pool. I am sick of complaints of the way you give unasked advice to your elders, and put your oar in on every occasion. You are not a cricket coach."

Sally looked sulky, but for once did not answer back. She loved the Eagles game, while the thought of a return to shrimping, as it was called, made her feel sick at heart.

"Why do you do it? . . . 'bound' so much, I mean?" went on Doris gruffly. She was a good-natured girl with a secret liking for her recruit's pluck, and yet she could not but admit that the child, apart from her play, was a prize beast of the worst order.

Sally flushed resentfully.

"I . . . I don't bound," she said. "It's just that I know about cricket, style, I mean. My uncle who taught me played for Yorkshire for years, and when some of them are holding their bat all wrong they get mad because I'm a lot younger than they are, and . . ."

"I suppose if you weren't such a kid you would know it was wise to hold your tongue and be less objectionable," broke in the elder girl. "I hear they call you Miss Cocksure, and if I were you I would live that name down as quickly as you can."

"I didn't give it to myself."

Doris Forbes laughed and laid her hand on the other's shoulder.

"Don't gobble with rage or I shall christen you Miss Turkey Cocksure," she said; and then, with a sudden return to the dignity of her office, "Anyhow I sent for you not to argue with you but to give you some wholesome advice and a warning. Control your tongue and manners or you may find yourself scrapped. See?"

She turned on her heel and walked away without waiting for an answer; and Sally clenched her hands to prevent herself running after her with the usual, "I don't care."

For once she did care, and when Olive Parker, who had been trying to listen to the conversation from a distance, called out in jeering tones, "Scrapped, are you, Cocky?" she turned on her savagely, instead of passing her by as usual with her nose in the air.

"No! You half-baked shrimp. If you are able to read, look on the board and you will see that I am down to play against Borley Club next Saturday."

This was quite true, and Sally Brendan, like the rest of

the Second Eleven, had been counting the days to the match; for it was to be played, not on the home ground, but at Borley, and this meant a char-a-banc ride with lunch and tea at the other end.

"Such a scrumptious feed too," said Cathy Manners of the Upper Fifth, who had played in the match last year. "Why, we had chickens and salad for lunch; I don't mean beastly oil and vinegar stuff, but fruit and cream with ices after tea."

Those of her audience who would not be going groaned; and one of them, Mabel Cosson, put an end to further descriptions by saying:

"Bet you anything you like the match is off! Patty Dolbey is in the San. with a temperature and headache; and Frisky, who is in her room, told me she was spotty all down her neck, only Matron said she wasn't to spread it about."

"That is why you are both keeping so quiet about it, I suppose?" suggested someone, while another voice chimed in:

"Spread what? Small-pox? I am jolly glad I have just been vaccinated. It makes absolute pits in one's skin, I hear."

After this, conversation degenerated into a medical discussion ranging over complaints varying from the Black Death to epileptic fits. Sally Brendan, standing on the outskirts of the group, took no part, for though, having had both measles and chicken-pox, she felt in a position to contradict each of the speakers in turn, she had learned that it was waste of breath to attempt this. Either her remarks were ignored, or someone took her by the shoulders and pushed her away out of earshot.

She would not indeed have remained so close but that she wanted to hear more about the match. This match, she had decided, would give her a chance to distinguish herself before an unprejudiced audience.

As she lay awake that night, with only Decima Pillditch's

snores to distract her thoughts, she pictured the captain of the Borley eleven congratulating her on her bowling, and saying:

"We all think that you must be really First Eleven, aren't you?"

That would be a heavy score against Doris Forbes and other snobs of the Upper Fifth and Sixth. Sally turned over on her side with a satisfied smile on her lips, and hopes soon became merged in dreams, not merely of pulling off a hat-trick, but of bowling the entire Borley eleven in as many balls.

"The only runs they made were in the overs that I wasn't bowling," she wrote home in an imaginary letter; and woke with a start to find the sun shining, and a bell ringing violently at the end of the passage.

The first information that greeted her was vouchsafed by Milly Grubb, the captain of the Second Eleven.

"Match off!" she said, and made no answer to Sally's twice-repeated "Why?"

"Beast!" muttered the girl; but during breakfast learned from general conversation that Mabel Gosson had been right in her prophecy. Patty Dolbey had developed measles, and Frisky Harrison, her chum, was also in the sanatorium under suspicion.

"Little cads!" said one of the Second Eleven of these unfortunates. "Why couldn't they have smothered their faces in flour or something until after the match was over?"

"Just imagine if Old Cocaine had caught them powdering their noses!"

"I suppose we shall all be shut up like maniacs for the rest of the term? Sort of thing one expects during Lent, but in the summer it is awful."

There was a general groan, and then Sally heard Peter's drawl:

"I had the afternoon off to go and see my cousins at Springley Manor, this side of Parchester, you know. I suppose they will have all had measles, so I can turn up

there all right as arranged. They are none of them children."

However, it was not all right. Miss Cockran made it quite clear that the entire school was in quarantine until further notice; and its inmates must content themselves in consequence with the school boundaries, unless taken for crocodile walks by a mistress. On Saturday afternoon, as there was no match, there was to be a picnic tea on that part of the shore reserved for Seascape House.

"A regular school-treat!" said Peter scornfully, her temper ruffled by a private interview with Miss Cockran, in which she had obtained no more than leave to write a note to her cousins explaining that she would be unable to go and see them.

"Why it's just a bribe to get us to be good little girls, and yet when we sit down to tea there will only be bread and butter mixed with sand and seaweed instead of eating it at tables like ordinary Christians."

The rest of the school was more resigned. After all, the shore was quite an interesting place, with rocks and pools and shells to occupy the attention, and a meal out of doors, even mixed with sand and seaweed, had its exciting side. Saturday, too, proved a perfect day, so calm and sunshiny that bathing prefects did not feel bound to send everyone out of the water after a three minutes' dip.

Sally swam well, just as she excelled in other sports; but she found it dull enough bathing alone, for, as usual, she was sent to Coventry, except for blustering threats of putting her under the water and keeping her there. These latter, of course, came from her enemies of the Fourth, led by Olive Parker.

"Let us drown the little beast," she shouted. "Here, you others, get in a ring and don't let it escape while Susy and I wash its face for it."

Without waiting for the attack, Sally plunged under water, and gripping Susy, who was the biggest of her tormentors, by the ankle pulled her after her. The next

minute she was the centre of a struggling group of excited girls, who shot water over her in handfuls as she came gasping to the surface, and tried to push her down again.

"Stop it! Do you hear, kids, stop it! or I shall call Edith Seymour."

Even with this threat, it was not until she had ducked Olive Parker and shaken her that Violet Tremson succeeded in restoring some measure of order.

"You are to leave Sally alone, you little beasts, see!"

"Well, you ducked me," said Olive Parker sulkily.

"I didn't make a plan of it as if I were plotting a dirty assassination. Five to one, aren't you, and all bigger than your victim?"

Olive glared, but the rest of her friends had scattered, evidently somewhat conscience-stricken; and she herself, looking back on it, did not feel so proud of her idea as when she had first suggested it.

"I was only fooling," she said, and her furtive glance at Sally might have been construed into an apology. She was obviously ashamed.

"I have never seen you not being a fool," flew to her victim's lips, and as the words were uttered all hopes of reconciliation vanished.

"Next time I get the chance of doing you in, there will be no fooling about it, I promise you," shouted the other angrily, as she splashed off to join her fellows, leaving Sally and Violet Tremson alone, the former up to her shoulders in water.

"Why do you say those things?" asked the elder girl; "they may be smart and to the point, but they are so . . . so hopeless for getting on, I mean, and making friends . . . having a good time here, you know. Olive isn't at all a bad sort if you wouldn't always tread on her toes so heavily. She is older than you, remember."

"Yes, but she is junior to me in school, and at any rate she went for me first. I didn't attack her . . . fact is I didn't want to have anything to say to that lot."

"She meant just now that she was sorry, Sally, and then you went and spoilt it all by saying what you did."

"I shall say what I like. I didn't ask you to rescue me, did I?"

This time Sally really despised herself for her rudeness. It had been decent of Violet to save her, but she was feeling sore over the cancelled cricket-match and all her vanished dreams of notoriety. That was why the words slipped out, and before she could mutter "Sorry!" Violet had answered with an aggravating sound of laughter in her voice:

"No! You didn't ask. You were mostly under water. Hardly in a position to do so, were you?"

"Then get out and go where someone does want you!"

In sudden flaming fury the younger girl scooped up a handful of water and flung it in her companion's face. Then she dived through a smoothly-rolling wave and came up a few yards off. Let Violet Tremson chase her and duck her if she liked; it would be no disgrace from someone so much taller. Violet, however, did nothing of the sort, but merely swam away leisurely towards a group of seniors gathered round a projecting rock.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

SALLY IS TAKEN UP

Tea was eaten picnic fashion on the beach, at four o'clock, and Sally wandered away with hers to a flat ledge of rocks, half-way up the cliff. Above her head were the two large, almost circular openings, known as the "Portholes."

Glorious hiding-places, these caves looked; but the rock descended sheer, some six feet below them, and beneath this again was a slope of broken shale and sand that offered no sure foothold, even to the most intrepid climber. The slope was surrounded by a barbed-wire fence, with a notice affixed, forbidding anyone to try to pass it.

Sally, as she earnestly studied the lie of the land, wished that she could think of some rapid way of mounting to the caves: it would cause a new sensation, and bring her once more into the limelight that she craved. Something of this desire was evident in her expression, for a derisive voice demanded suddenly, "Going to jump up there, or fly?"

It was Mabel Gosson, of the Lower Fifth; rather a stupid giggler, but a kind-hearted girl, and a friend of the daring Peter.

"No—hardly—but I could easily climb inside, if I were let down on a rope from the top. It's no distance."

Her tone was so earnest that Mabel ceased to jeer, and even looked a trifle alarmed.

"Look here, kid, don't go trying any fool games like you did on the train. Take my word for it, that the only entrance to those caves is from Borley Chine."

"That's nearly a mile along the coast?"

"Not quite, but out of bounds, at any rate. The Chine used to be a smuggling bay, you know, and it is said there are some kegs of brandy stored under Old Cocaine's study, and that she has a private staircase down to them, concealed in her cupboard." Mabel giggled as she spoke.

"You mean there are rooms underground, all the way from the Chine up here?"

"Passages with ledges, more likely—I don't know. We have never been allowed to go there since a boy is supposed to have got walled up there, some years ago, by falling rock, and lost. He was wanted by the police, so I expect myself that he went to America instead."

"It would be rather interesting to unearth the skeleton."

"Beastly," said Mabel, shivering a little. "You are an unpleasant child."

It suddenly occurred to her that it was really beneath her dignity to chatter with a new kid in this familiar way; but to hold her tongue was almost beyond Mabel Gosson's power, if she could find a listener.

"Well, I suppose you mean to start hunting at once?"

she sneered, with a sudden assumption of superiority, and prepared to walk off.

"Why not?"

"To-day?"

Sally shrugged. She was playing her usual game of creating a sensation; but her coolness was a trifle overdone, and the other girl sniggered mockingly.

"Peter," she called, "Peter, just come and listen to this. You will die of laughing."

Sally's heart beat fast, as Trina Morrison rose languidly and strolled over towards them. At last, this almost grown-up girl, whom she was determined to make her friend, had been induced to notice her; but the acknowledgment, when it came, was scarcely flattering.

"Oh! it's only the Cocky-doodle. What is she crowing for now? Made the sun rise, eh? I'm sure I don't want to talk to her."

Unexpected tears sprang to Sally's eyes as her romantic day-dreams were shattered.

"I—I didn't ask you to come," she said, with more humility, however, than defiance in her voice; and Peter threw back her head and laughed:

"No—or I guess I shouldn't have arrived. What is it, Mabs?"

"Why, the young ass over there says she is going to climb into the Portholes to-day."

"Oh, she says that, does she? Little liar—her name ought to be Matilda."

Now Mabel Gosson's version had not been exactly what Sally said, but wounded pride made her forget this.

"I am not afraid," she returned hotly.

"Oh, nor are we, for you, so don't hesitate to begin on our account. If you slip, and fall in a jammy mass, the school will hardly mourn or order funeral wreaths out of its pocket money—eh, Mabs?"

Mabel Gosson giggled. Peter often had a cruel tongue, and her slower-witted friend was afraid of it.

"She wouldn't be such an ass as to go," she said uncomfortably.

Sally glared. "I am going to get into those caves, all the same," she said; "so you needn't be so beastly superior."

"Climb on, MacDuff, and we will 'wait and see'—a case of pride and the fall, I prophesy."

Peter seated herself on the ledge of rock as she spoke, and picking up the remains of Sally's unfinished tea, munched it calmly, while Mabel sank down giggling by her side.

"Buck up, kid," she said. "Hop it, or fly; I bet you stick on the barbed wire and have to be plucked off by a prefect."

"I am not going to get in by climbing, you see."

At this there was derisive laughter from Peter, and Sally, in one of her sudden furies, caught her by the shoulder, and shook her.

"I won't kill myself just to amuse you, so there—but there is another way into the caves, and I mean to find it."

Trina Morrison was on her feet now. At first she had looked amazed and furious at the onslaught; but then, to Mabel's surprise, she merely smiled and freed herself.

"It will be out of bounds, you know," she said, in her usual drawl; and Sally nodded.

"You mean I shall be expelled, if I'm caught—Much I care! I loathe this place, and wouldn't be sorry if I never saw a single soul in it again."

"Quite so! Then you intend to commit educational suicide by trotting off to Borley Chine—do you?"

"That's my business."

"Admitted—but take a word of advice. Don't do anything so dull as to explore caves. If you must run risks in order to crow about them afterwards, just trot into Parchester, and buy me some chocolates."

Sally's breath came in a choke; her temper vanished.

"I—why, of course I will, with pleasure, if you will only ask me decently; and I have money of my own too."

She almost whispered the words; and in her eyes was entreaty—something of the look of a dog, accustomed to kicks, who would give his world for a little kindness.

Trina Morrison studied her for a few seconds, beneath narrowed lids, then she laughed, but this time without jeering. She had a very pretty laugh.

"Bless us! If the kid hasn't got a soft side, like a hedgehog unrolled," she exclaimed. And then to Sally, "Of course I will ask you decently, I might even give you a kiss, if you chose the chocolates I like."

Sally went very red. "I hate kissing," she muttered; "but I'll go. Which do you like—soft? Or hard, with nuts?"

Mabel, who had been watching the pair in amazement, now interposed, "Oh, Peter! You oughtn't to send her. She is only a new kid."

"Shut up," said Sally. Then to Trina Morrison, "Well, I'm off. No one will miss me till supper, and that's not till eight. Anyhow, I don't care if they do see me."

The elder girl smiled, catching her by the wrist, as she turned to go.

"A wrinkle from an old hand at the game you are playing," she said. "Leave your school hat-band behind the first hedge."

Sally nodded. "I shan't take it—I brought a cap of my own from home, just for this kind of occasion," she said, airily; and then, kissing her hand to the dismayed Mabel Gosson as she called out "Good-by-ee," she clambered over the rocks towards the steps.

In the school garden she met no one, though she could hear the mistresses having tea and playing tennis on the other side of the big hedge. Servants were moving in the house, but no one saw her as she crossed hall, ran up the stairs and down the corridor to her own room—No. 9.

It was empty, for the girls were forbidden to enter their dormitories during the daytime; and Sally knew that if she were caught, all chance, even of starting on her adventure,

would be at an end. Feverishly she hunted through her chest of drawers for her purse, jumping guiltily, as though she were committing a theft, when a clock in the hall clanged five. Some coppers tumbled out on to the floor as she pulled the purse towards her, and Sally had only just time to gather them up in her hand when she heard footsteps coming leisurely down the passage.

Where could she hide? Not under one of the five iron bedsteads, that, without valances, and with the curtains of the cubicles well pulled back, left the floor fully exposed to view. The only other chance was the cupboard behind her, hung thick with dressing-gowns and coats; and into this Sally forced her way, kneeling doubled up, successfully concealed for the moment, it is true, but a prey to cramp, and almost suffocated by her shelter.

The someone whose footsteps she had heard entered the room, tip-toed across the floor, and stood listening; then moved a bed, and half opened a window.

"It 's the Matron, bother her!" muttered Sally angrily.

This Matron was already one of her chief enemies at Seascape House; for tidiness, with Mrs. Brendan to spoil her daughters by clearing up their rooms after them, had not been enforced at home: and at school it was one of the few things in which Sally did not seek to excel. "I thought putting things in order was your business, not ours," she had said rudely, when first called to account for a bed heaped with odds and ends of ties, handkerchiefs and gloves; and Miss Budd's heavy figure had heaved with indignation, while her cheeks purpled at this piece of impudence.

"Any more disobedience or rudeness, and I report you at once to Miss Cockran," she had said with finality; and Sally guessed that now that moment had come. She did not look forward to the interview, for Old Cocaine, though small and pinched, had penetrating grey eyes, which she did not care to meet, unless there were some big piece of mischief that she could brazen out, and so, perhaps, arouse

astonishment or interest in their depths, instead of pity or contempt.

Very carefully she shifted her position, and tried to part the coats and dressing-gowns, so as to give herself a little air, and view the room. Unfortunately, in doing so, she forgot the coppers clasped in her hand: as she caught at the coat in front of her, they fell in all directions; one or two inside the cupboard, but the rest on the floor outside. It seemed to Sally weeks before the last halfpenny struck a wall, and subsided noisily under a chest of drawers.

"So that's over—and the fat hag has caught me finely," she told herself, and pushing the clothes aside, stepped out with a sullen frown, into the room.

CHAPTER THE SIXTH

AN ESCAPADE

"My good child, are you trying to play hide-and-seek? And if so, whom with? You will never get to Parchester at this rate." It was Trina Morrison's drawl, and with a gasp of relief, Sally realised that she was the intruder.

"I—I—made sure that you were Matron," she said limply.

"We may both thank our stars that I am not; but on this occasion I will let that insult pass. Tell me—were you really intending to go into town, or only bluffing?"

"I was going, of course—I mean, I am going. You see, I have a ten-shilling note Mother gave me before I left, besides my pocket money. I will buy you some really decent chocolates."

"Nice kid!"

Peter's voice was at its softest, and her hand, laid lightly on the other's shoulder, became a caress.

"I am not going to try and stop you, but——"

"It's no use trying to stop me—I told you."

"Well, let me make a suggestion, then—it is this. Why shouldn't I come too?"

Sally clasped her hands tight, and her eyes shone.

"Together, we might astonish the school," she said solemnly. "I have always felt it, and longed to know you."

Trina Morrison laughed. "Quaint kid, would that be a great deed?" she asked. Her twinkle, and the derision in her tone, pricked the bubble of Sally's vanity, making her all at once feel very young and silly.

"Why are you going, then?" she demanded a little sullenly, and again the other laughed.

"Not to astonish the school; that's certain. Why, my dear young ass, don't you realise that if we are expelled we shall not be allowed to contaminate the rest of Seascape House, even as a ten minutes' variety show?"

Sally glowered, as her vision of creating a super-sensation in the hall or class-room faded.

"Anyhow, I'm going . . ." she began.

"Well, for goodness' sake get a move on, then, and don't argue about the why or wherefore. Isn't it enough to want to do a thing to make it worth while? We had better separate, I think, and meet at the third elm by the corner of the road, opposite Marston's cottage. I shall go by my own private road, and wait five minutes, to see if you've been caught or not . . ."

Sally nodded. "Right oh!" she said carelessly. "I shall be there."

But beneath her studied lack of enthusiasm was a joy she had not felt since she left home. Once again she had triumphed, and the only girl whom she admired out of this horrible school had chosen her for a friend. Fortified by the idea of this companionship, she left the dormitory boldly, and ran downstairs, concealing herself behind the large hall door just before Miss Cockran swept through it from the front drive.

After this, hours passed, it seemed, though in reality it could only have been a few minutes, while the Head-

mistress sorted her letters from amongst the newly-arrived post on the table, and disappeared, reading them as she went.

Sally made a face at her vanishing back, fled across the hall, as she heard Miss Rogers' voice in the garden, entered the dining-room, at this time deserted, dropped out of one of the open windows on to a flower-bed, and took refuge in the shrubbery across the nearest path. To negotiate the grounds after this was simple—merely a doubling backward and forward to shelter her movements with bushes and undergrowth—and then a bold walk out through the gates on to the high road.

Trina Morrison was seated in a dry ditch, leaning against an elm, at the corner of the road, opposite a thatched cottage.

"I was just giving you up," she drawled, looking at her wrist watch. "I made certain Matron had got you this time."

"Not she. . . . I dodged Old Cocaine too, and Proggins . . . you would have laughed."

And Sally launched at once into her favourite subject of her own prowess; but only to break off angrily, as she noticed Peter yawn and pause to pick some ferns.

"Why, you are not listening!"

"I am not amused. . . . Like Queen Victoria, we never listen when we are not amused—I didn't know you were such a kid."

"I am not a kid—in brains, I mean. Why, I am top of the Remove—easily, too. I shall be in your form next term."

"You might become top of that, and still be a boresome child."

Sally stared at her blankly, and the retort "What rot!" died on her lips. Perhaps Trina Morrison was right. Sally knew that she was nearly bottom of the Lower Fifth, and yet, compared with Cecilia, who was grown up, she was a woman of the world.

"How am I such a kid?" she mumbled at last; and there was real humility in the question.

"You boast like a five-year-old—and do nothing but talk about yourself, when, Heaven knows, the world is full of more interesting subjects. Then you have no self-control, but if any one laughs at you, your temper blows up like a powder magazine."

The directness of this attack, and the cool indifference with which it was delivered, left the younger girl dumb-founded. Cecilia had often levelled the same accusations, but they had never before struck Sally's inner consciousness with any conviction of truth.

"You . . . you aren't being fair to me," she muttered; and then relapsed into complete silence, as she realised Trina Morrison did not care in the least if she were fair or not—nor whether her words hurt her listener. Quite unconcerned as to the effect of her speech, she strolled along with her hands in her pockets, until they came to some cross roads, when she took a turning to the right.

Sally caught her arm, and pointed to the sign-post.

"Why, Peter, look, it says straight on to Parchester,"

"Well, I'm not going to Parchester, you see."

"Then where are we going? I don't understand."

"I happen to be going to call on my cousins at Springley Manor. They asked me to tea to-day."

She may have laid a slight emphasis on the "I"; Sally, at any rate, found herself flushing, as though she had been guilty of thrusting her company where it was not wanted.

"I had better leave you, then," she said gruffly. "My way is in the other direction." She turned back, with her shoulders rather humped, and her mouth curved in sulky lines. This friendship was not developing as she had hoped.

The next instant a hand rested on hers, and she heard the soft drawling voice she found so full of attraction.

"Silly kid," it said. "Why, of course, you are coming with me. We will wangle some chocolates out of my cousins, instead of stealing your ten shillings."

After this, the walk was bliss for the younger girl, though she found it hard work to refrain from boasting or talking about herself. One thing she did relate, and that was the story of the goat that she had tied up in the parish schoolroom.

Trina Morrison shouted with laughter: indeed, they were both making so merry over the recital that a car, following them up the side road that had now become a mere country lane, nearly ran them down.

"Why the dickens can't you two girls look where you are going?" shouted an angry male voice, and then broke off abruptly, while the car, which had slowed down, stopped.

"My stars! If it isn't Trina. I understood from the mater that you were laid low, fair cousin—veiled in spots, in fact."

"Not yet; so I decided to look you all up as I got bored with playing at Margate, or Blackpool, on the shore this afternoon. You are just in time to give me a lift, Austin."

"With pleasure."

He opened the door beside him, and then looked hesitatingly at Sally. "Who is the kid?" he whispered. "Where does she come in?"

"Why, behind, of course; that is, if she is not afraid of your driving. Let me introduce Miss Sally Brendan—my cousin, Austin Ferrars, who has nearly killed us. Sally was trudging into Parchester to buy me some chocolates, so I brought her here instead, as I know you always have a supply."

"One of your slaves, eh?" he half-whispered, lifting his eyebrows and smiling; and Sally, who overheard him, found her heart beating fast, as she listened for Trina's answer. Yesterday she would have been furious at the insinuation, but now she waited for an acknowledgement, even, of her existence.

The answer was, as usual, unexpected.

"No—not my slave—merely a friend," Peter said

smoothly. Then, "Do get in quick, kid—we shall only have about half-an-hour we can stop, as it is."

It seemed to Sally that the car flew over the ground, and soon they were the centre of a group of people drawn from the neighbouring tennis court by the honk of the motor as it slowed up in front of a low ivy-covered house. On all sides there were exclamations of astonishment, and some mild scoldings from an elderly lady, whom Trina called "Aunt Edith."

"Why, child, I don't understand this. I only got a note this morning saying that you were unable to come."

"That was dictated by Miss Cockran. This is my own answer."

There was a roar of laughter from the younger members of the party at this impudent assurance; but Aunt Edith shook her head.

"I am always glad to see you, Trina, as you know; but I don't always approve of your behaviour," she said, with some severity—on which her niece put her arms round her and kissed her.

"Love me, even if you don't approve of me," she said lightly, and then to Austin—"What about some chocolates?"

She disappeared after him into the house; and Sally, who had dismounted from the car, was left standing forlornly in the drive, until an old gentleman took pity on her and suggested that she might like some tea.

She agreed, and was soon seated near the tennis court, enjoying iced cake and strawberries and cream.

"So you are a pair of runaways?" said the old gentleman at last, fixing his pince-nez, and staring down at the girl beside him.

"Yes—you see it's so dull at school. Peter, that is Trina, you know, had been growing bored stiff this term, and I'm just the same."

"H'm! Trina is a very wild girl, I'm afraid."

There was condemnation in his tone, and Sally answered

indignantly, "She is an absolutely wonderful person—you couldn't expect her to behave like ordinary people."

She did not realise that it was almost the first time she had praised anyone else whole-heartedly and without condescension; she only knew her anger was rising steadily as her companion continued with a shrug:

"Oh, she has charm all right, I grant you—but she's selfish, confoundedly selfish—so if you haven't found it out already, be warned, my dear, by one who has known her since she was a baby."

"She isn't selfish—not a scrap. Why, she wouldn't let me go into Parchester this afternoon and buy her chocolates."

The old gentleman smiled at the vehemence of this reply.

"Dear me! Dear me! Wouldn't she let you do that?" he murmured. "It was very thoughtful of her;" then added drily, "but she seems to have got some chocolates—all the same."

As he spoke, Trina Morrison appeared on the tennis lawn with her cousin and some of the other young members of the party. She was munching sweets out of a box and talking excitedly. Sally thought how pretty she was, and admired the ease with which she parried the jokes of the teasing group round her.

"A flying visit, I fear, Uncle Tom," she said, coming up to the old man. "Austin is going to run me back in his car."

"By rights I should go too, and inform Miss Cockran that we have been no party to your misdeeds."

His tone was grim, but his niece merely laughed.

"Dear Uncle Tom," she said lightly, "picture your awful half-hour, while Old Cocaine told you my faults, till you rose in righteous anger at an attack on the family and defended me. Besides, you wouldn't be a spoil-sport."

He turned away with an impatient movement, as Austin broke in eagerly:

"Dad thinks as we do—that it's jolly plucky of you. But, I say, must you go yet?"

"I'm afraid so. Lend me your big coat, do—and I will drive. Good-bye, Uncle Tom—good-bye, Aunt Edith. Next time I'll come for a night, if you will arrange a dance."

Sally thought that the grown-ups near her were not exactly pleased at this casual farewell. Indeed, one lady said discontentedly, "Why, it's too bad!—Austin going off again like that. He promised to make up a set directly he returned from the station."

"He seems to have forgotten that," returned someone else. But by this time Sally was running over the lawn, towards the car, whose engine had begun to throb.

"Aren't you going to take me?" she called; and those standing round laughed—including Trina, who answered calmly:

"Of course, but I had forgotten you for the moment, kid. Here, hop in behind, and have some chocolates."

"She had better put on this coat."

It was Uncle Tom speaking, and as he helped the young girl into its ample folds, he whispered, with a jerk of his hand towards the driving-seat—"Don't trust her too much, child, or she may lead you into Queer Street."

"She landed me here," said Sally coolly; and in spite of the shock caused by this rejoinder, Uncle Tom burst out laughing.

"Bless me! I believe you can look after yourself all right, and I needn't have worried," he said, as he slammed the door; and he turned back into the house without waiting to watch them go.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

PENALTIES

'WHAT was it Uncle Tom said to you just now?" asked Trina sharply, as they turned a corner of the drive that shut out the house from view; and when Sally told her of his warning and her own rejoinder, she laughed so much that the car swerved, and nearly carried away a gate-post at the end of the drive.

"Poor old Bean!" she said. "Did you hear that, Austin? He must have had the shock of his life."

Her cousin, who was trying to take the steering-wheel from her, did not look altogether amused.

"Cheeky little beast!" he murmured. And then louder, "Here! stop it, Trina, and let me drive. You have forgotten all I taught you last holidays, and are just carrying on like a madman."

"Don't be so fussy and old-maidish. I am quite all right, and anyhow, if we did graze the gate, it wants painting badly enough."

"You idiot! It is my new car that matters—not a silly gate-post. Here, do move——"

"'J'y suis—j'y reste'—Don't play the grandmother—I could drive quite well if you wouldn't keep interfering."

With this, they began a quarrel that lasted pleasantly enough, for they laughed most of the time, until the school wall appeared in the distance. Sally, munching chocolates on her back seat, was quite content to be forgotten, though her heart sank a little when she thought of the dangers that lay ahead. At this minute, when she had gained the friend she wished, expulsion did not seem so glorious as a few hours ago, and she wondered at Trina's unconcern. That was manifest, even when the car at last slowed down in a lane that bordered the school grounds.

"There, stop beneath that tree; it's my usual ladder," said the elder girl. "If you bend your shoulders, Austin,

SALLY FELT HERSELF SWUNG OFF HER FEET

I can clamber up on them, and pull myself easily on to the wall."

She suited her actions to her words, and was soon seated on the top, peering mischievously down through the branches.

"Now lift up the kid," she commanded; and Sally felt herself swung off her feet, then grasped from above, and hoisted, until she rested securely beside her companion—clasping the chocolate box.

When they had wriggled out of their coats, and flung them back into the car, Austin stood up and bowed.

"I envy you your interview with Old Cocaine, my ladies," he said, grinning, "and remember, Trina, if you get the chuck, we can always house you for a bit."

"Thanks awfully—Uncle Tom and Aunt Edith would so love to have me, wouldn't they? But anyhow, there won't be any 'Come into my study' business on this occasion. Sally and I have merely been walking in the grounds, so wrapped in heart-to-heart conversation, that we forgot all about supper—including plum-and-apple jam—wonderful illustration of friendship, isn't it, Sally-kid?"

Sally laughed, a little uncomfortably. The motor disappeared, and they had scrambled down the tree into the grounds, when she ventured to say at last:

"All the same, Peter, you know that sort of tale won't be believed if we are caught—and I suppose we are sure to be—with prefects poking their noses everywhere for somebody to report."

"My child, when you have played truant as often as I have you will know there is a science in getting caught. In this case, as soon as we are out of the garden, I go round to the junior play-room, and enter boldly by the window."

"That's simply walking into the lions' den."

"Yes, silly; but the point is—choose your lion. There will be Poppy Bristow in charge of the kids until they go to bed; she told me so."

"Oh!" said Sally, with sudden understanding. "You

mean that, even though she is a prefect, she won't dare to report you?"

Trina laughed—a rather unpleasant laugh, that had a good deal of malice in it.

"Poppy is head of my dormitory, and I see she runs it all right, and gets her sleep—and she leaves me alone in return. Poppy loves her Peter," she added, and then, "Come on, kid; be bold and resolute, and follow me."

They crossed the empty gardens in silence, only halting once to hide their caps in a thick bush.

"Fetch them to-morrow," whispered the elder girl; "and we had better leave the chocolate box as well. Stuff your pockets with those that remain—there will be no other evidence that we have been outside the place."

It was still light; but the blinds were down in the mistresses' quarters, and the girls stole across the grass undiscovered, until they came to the junior play-room. Here, the window was open, and pulling the blind aside, Trina peered within.

"Fat Poppy is there all right," she said, "so now is the hour to strike;" and flinging up the sash, she scrambled over the low sill and into the room, followed by Sally.

"Hullo! my Poppet," she began cheerfully. "Can we lend a hand with the kids?"

The prefect gave a start, and put down the book that she had been reading. Her fat puffy face became anxious, rather morose, and she frowned.

"You were neither of you at supper," she said, with an obvious effort to be dignified and severe. "Where have you been?"

"Talking sweet nothings with Sally, in the garden—so sweet, we even forgot the plum-and-apple jam."

The little girls who had gathered round giggled. They all admired Peter immensely for her daring; besides, she petted them, when she remembered, and gave them smuggled sweets.

Poppy Bristow flushed.

"It sounds unlikely," she said.

"Do you mean that I'm a liar?"

All the carelessness in Trina Morrison's voice had vanished: instead, there was a cold fury that would have deceived Sally herself unless she had known it was a clever piece of acting. At once it placed her accuser in the wrong, and Poppy, backing towards the fire-place, stammered—

"Of c-course not, Peter, I didn't mean that."

"Then what do you mean?"

"I mean . . . mean it's very wr-wrong of you to stay out so late, and . . . and all that sort of thing. Edith Seymour was taking supper, and she noticed you weren't there."

"Oh, she did, did she?"

"Yes,—and she said if she c-caught you, she'd report you to Miss C-Cockran."

"And I suppose you said at once, 'You are q-quite right, Edith,' and all that sort of thing?"

Trina mimicked the prefect's stammer and vagueness so cleverly that all the juniors laughed; while Poppy Bristow's naturally red face, that had won her her nickname, flushed even more deeply.

"Be quiet, Peter," she said, with a desperate attempt at dignity and confidence. "You shouldn't talk to a prefect like that."

"All right, old dear; I'm sorry." Trina's tone was suddenly conciliatory. "But I do hate you just imitating a stiff old poker like Edith Seymour. In a public school, prefects should act on their own responsibility; not be always confessing their weakness by reporting to the staff—and you can usually follow a line of your own, too—at least I thought so."

Poppy Bristow smiled, and looked important.

"If you hadn't tried to be funny over things I never said," she returned, "I would have told you that that was very nearly the answer I made to Edith."

"Good for you! Well, what are you going to do? . . . put us in gaol, eh?"

Trina slipped her arm into Sally's and laughed. "We will own up that we have sinned, won't we, kid? But it's a temptation to linger out of doors on a summer night."

"Rather!" said Sally. "We are frightfully sorry, of course." But she could not keep a tinge of cheerful impudence out of her voice, and Poppy Bristow scowled at her as she said hesitatingly:

"You had better do some lines, and let me have them by Wednesday—Tennyson's Idylls—let me see—say 700."

"My good Poppy!"

Trina looked extremely injured as she added:

"Why, I have an Algebra paper, and an essay on Cromwell, and . . ."

"Well, 300 lines, each of you," said the prefect hurriedly, "and if I don't get them by Wednesday, of course I shall have to report you to Miss Cockran."

"Right oh! Your will is law; but I do think you are a hard old flint. Still, it's something to have a prefect that knows her own mind."

If there was a gleam of mockery in Trina Morrison's eyes, her tone did not betray her as she turned away, with Sally following at her heels.

In the passage the two girls ran into Edith Seymour, who called to them to stop when they tried to push by her.

"Where have you been, Peter?" she said sharply; "you were not at supper."

"In the garden, but we have just reported to Poppy Bristow."

"Has she sent you to Miss Cockran?"

"That's her business, isn't it? She was made a prefect the same time as you."

Edith Seymour bit her lip. Like all the elder girls who cared for school discipline, she disliked Trina Morrison.

"I shall speak to Poppy," she said briefly.

Sally clutched her friend's arm when they were left alone. "I say, you were splendid, Peter. But won't Poppy

give in to her and report us after all? Edith Seymour has such a much stronger will."

Again Trina uttered her malicious little laugh. "I don't think so, kid. You see Poppy has to sleep in my room, not with Edith Seymour. She hates quarrelling with me; besides, I have put her back up about taking advice, and she is as vain as a peacock, if you stir her up the right way."

"What do you think will happen, then?"

"A row between Poppy and Edith, of course, and meanwhile, we shall escape. I have done this sort of thing before, my child, and it is risks like these that keep school life from becoming unutterably boring."

Sally's eyes gleamed. This was a point of view that, at the moment, won her whole-hearted admiration and assent.

"You are splendid," she repeated; and then, tentatively, "I say, Peter, if you do this sort of thing again, you will let me join in, won't you?"

"Perhaps—I can't say."

"Oh, Peter, do . . . please . . . I would like most awfully to be your friend, and will never give you away—and you will let me write all the lines for us both, won't you? I can imitate your hand quite easily, if I take time, I really can."

Trina laughed, her musical jolly laugh.

"Well, I don't mind, if it would give you any pleasure. I never refuse a good offer."

"And you will be my friend?"

"Perhaps, if you will only hustle, and grow up a bit—and not talk about yourself. I simply couldn't stand that. Why, it's more boring than school."

Her eyes had a teasing smile, but Sally did not fly into her usual rage.

"I'll try," she said humbly. "It has been a simply scrumptious day, you know."

Trina bent and kissed her carelessly. "And yet we haven't astonished the school—nor bowled the Borley Second Eleven," she said mockingly.

"I had forgotten all about the match," answered the younger girl simply; but as she climbed the stairs to her room she was rather astonished at herself all the same. That morning, the match and its postponement had occupied her entire thoughts.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

A RIFT IN THE LUTE

It was the Tuesday evening after the adventures of the last chapter; and the Lower Fifth was holding what it called an "Indignation Meeting" under the line of oaks that bordered the cricket field. (It is the way of Lower Fifths to adopt such excitable measures to express their feelings, while Upper Fifth and Sixth stroll by in dignified contempt, and Juniors stand at a distance and wish they were able to join in the discussion, or had thought of holding a "pow-wow" themselves.)

"Only three cases of measles—one of them scarcely a bit spotty, so Matron says—and yet here we all are shut up like lepers for the whole summer."

"Last Saturday's Second Eleven match cancelled, and now next Saturday's First Eleven! You bet there will be no half-term leave, or fête. I can't see it's worth while going to school at all."

"Simply rotten sport! Look here, let us insist that those who have had measles are not lepers, and can go anywhere they ordinarily would have, in any decently managed term."

"Rather! and if not, we will all go on strike."

"Oh, do let's! Strikers always win—my father says so."

"Whom do you intend to strike first? Cocaine? And if so, what with?—A bath sponge?"

It was Peter speaking now, from under the shade of a big hat, and there was contempt mingled with amusement in her lazy voice.

"Oh, Peter darling!—so you have woken up at last. Do tell us what you did on Saturday; something awful, I'm quite sure."

The Lower Fifth, uncertain how to proceed with a strike from any practical standpoint, was quite glad to change the subject.

As Mabel Gosson took her friend by the arm and shook her gently to elicit an answer to her question, another of the Form broke in with:

"There was a fiendish row, I know, between Poppy and Edith Seymour, as soon as the Juniors had gone to bed; and then they had another kick-up at the prefects' meeting yesterday. I heard Poppy was heavily censured: or whatever committees do, when they are sick with anyone. I saw Poppy afterwards, and she was mad with you, Peter . . . said it was all your fault, and she wished you would leave."

"Kind of her! I'm sure. It is I who ought to be in tears, 300 lines of 'Morte d'Arthur' for my sins."

"And you have done them already?"

Trina Morrison took off her hat, and flapped it at her questioner.

"My friend, am I not always a slave to duty? Rest assured that they will be done. I think I may safely say that Little Arthur's barge has pushed off from the bulrushes towards Avilion, by now."

"Yes—but it is not you who are pushing the barge, but Sally Brendan."

There was much criticism in Violet Tremson's tone; and criticism of Peter's actions was so rare in the Lower Fifth that Trina raised her eyebrows while the rest stared.

"My good child, why be a purist? Did I lay claim to be the moving spirit?"

"No—but you didn't say, either, that Sally wasn't able to go to cricket yesterday, or to-day, because she is doing your lines, as well as her own. Doris Forbes is mad with her; and thinks she doesn't bother to turn up and practise,

because there are no matches. If she loses her place in the Second Eleven, it will be your fault."

Violet Tremson was on her feet now, her usually calm eyes bright with indignation; but Trina merely shrugged her shoulders and settled herself more comfortably against her tree.

"Sally the Martyr," she said pleasantly. "Such a shy gentle soul, that she always needs mothering and persuading to make her do what she wishes."

Everyone laughed, except Violet, who made an impatient movement with her foot.

"I wish you would leave her alone, Peter. You are not playing fair by her—messing up her chances at cricket, etc."

At this point there was a general shout of "Oh, shut up, Violet. What business is it of yours?" And then Sally appeared, very inky and rather breathless.

"Just look, Peter," she said, producing some sheets of closely written foolscap, and pressing them into Trina's hand. "I don't believe anyone but a Scotland Yard detective could see the difference between them and the lines you gave me."

The elder girl sat up, and after examining them carelessly, patted the younger on the back.

"You will have to look out, kid, or if the habit grows on you it will be a case of spending your days in prison for forgery."

"Then you do think them awfully good, don't you?"

Sally couldn't resist angling for further praise. She wished she had not done so, as she met Peter's mocking glance.

"Oh, they are certainly good enough to take in an ass like Poppy; if no one here has an attack of conscience, and gives the show away."

Cries of—"Of course we won't, Peter—Rather not!" arose on all sides.

Sally stood shifting from one leg to the other, her face

sullen. No one had taken any notice of her, or looked at her handiwork, except Peter, who had not even thanked her. All her pride rose in arms.

"I think it's a frightfully good copy, myself," she said at last, defiantly.

"I wouldn't go so far as that," retorted Trina calmly; "you have scarcely done the dots over my 'i's' justice, for instance, or the fashionable curve of my 's'. Still, I dare-say it's quite a good effort for a youngster." And she yawned.

There was a roar of laughter that made Sally go hot with rage.

"If the lines are not good enough for you, I won't ask you to make use of them," she said furiously.

Trina Morrison's eyes had closed; but now she half-opened them languidly, and her voice, when she spoke, had a cold edge to it.

"Take them back if you want," she said curtly, "and clear out, do." There was silence while Sally stood, her hands clenched, fighting a battle between her pride and newly proffered loyalty. Were pride to conquer, she knew it would be an end of all friendship between herself and Peter; and could she bear this? There was entreaty in the glance with which she looked at last at the elder girl, but the other's eyes were shut again, and she realised there was to be no half-way house of mercy.

"I . . . I don't want the lines, Peter. You know I did them for you."

The words were so halting—her voice so humble—that she hardly recognised it. Now, perhaps, Trina would speak a few words of thanks, but she did not; and after a fresh tussle with her pride, that urged her to pick up the foolscap and tear it into little pieces, Sally left it on the grass, and, turning on her heel, walked away across the playing-fields.

"I suppose they are all jeering at me," she told herself miserably. "Now they will despise me as soft, besides

hating me." With difficulty she choked back tears, and hurried along, that she might not catch the echo of Fifth Form laughter. Had she known it, the group she had left, instead of laughing at her, was quite silent, until Violet Tremson said:

"You are a prize beast, Peter."

And though Mabel Gosson told her to shut up, and not be a prig, and someone else muttered, "It will do the little ass good to be taken down a peg," no one looked quite comfortable about it.

Trina Morrison might be a joy to the Lower Fifth, but even her admirers did not always understand her.

"Of course she has her nasty side; most people have," they would explain her lapses from their ordinary code; and perhaps part of her fascination lay in the uncertainty of what she would do and say on different occasions.

Now she made no visible effort to combat criticism, or justify herself. As the school-house bell rang, she got up leisurely and gathered the lines from "Morte d'Arthur" together.

"There goes Poppy, so I may as well get rid of these at once," she said, and strolled off after the prefect.

The Lower Fifth could see her slip her arm through Poppy's and hear her friendly laugh, as she handed over the sheets of foolscap.

"And she'll have that fat idiot purring before they have gone the length of the playing-fields," said Mabel Gosson, with an admiring sigh. "Peter is a wonder, you know. Why, anyone else who went on as she does, would have been expelled long ago."

"I wish she was expelled," said Violet Tremson angrily. "She is just pushing the school downhill as hard as she can. You all know she is a rotter, and yet you let her trample on you and take the lead—even some of the Sixth do too, like Poppy."

"You were keen enough on her yourself, when you first came—as much a slave to her as any of us."

"I know I was; and it hurt me frightfully when I found out she wasn't straight, and . . . and what a selfish beast she really is. That is why I hate to see the way she is carrying on with a kid like Sally Brendan."

"Oh, do leave off crabbing Peter; after all, she is my friend," said Mabel Gosson crossly. "If you keep on any more, Violet, everyone in the school will say you are jealous because she dropped you, and surely that prickly hedgehog of a child can look after herself. You should have seen her shake Peter the other afternoon on the beach."

"Of course she can. I wonder Peter ever took any notice of her at all, after that."

"It was really frightfully good of someone Peter's age to go on an adventure with a little ass of her sort."

"Rather! and I say, we never heard what Peter did. . . . She is a sport. We must get it out of her."

By the time the Lower Fifth group had reached the school, all Peter's admirers had recovered the full extent of their admiration. Only Violet Tremson was silent, her usually calm face perplexed by a struggle waging in her mind between two sets of inclinations.

One decision would be, to leave Sally alone to work out her fate. It wasn't even as though she were the type of girl to need a champion, or had shown any wish to be friendly. She was cheeky, conceited, self-sufficient; and wouldn't really mind being expelled, if what she boasted were true.

Violet was well aware of all this, and wondered at her own reluctance to accept the obvious conclusion that Sally's affairs were no business of hers.

"And yet I should hate her to be expelled," she told herself. "She has such lots of brains and pluck. One day, if she stops on here, she will be head of the school and games—ever so much better at running both than Doris Forbes, because she has more imagination."

Violet Tremson was still arguing with herself when she went in to supper. Sally, she could see, had been crying,

and now, left in Coventry by her neighbours, made merely a pretence of swallowing her bread and jam. Trina Morrison, on the contrary, surrounded by her friends, was making so much noise that every now and then an exasperated prefect demanded silence from that end of the table.

"She is a beast," said Violet of Peter; and marvelled at the wave of indignation that, for the moment, swept her. Why should she care if a girl who had been persistently rude to her was snubbed and humiliated? It was a difficult question to answer, because the demands of friendship, as of love, are independent of argument and common sense. If Sally craved for Trina's affection, Violet knew in her heart that she would have liked the chance of winning Sally's.

"I suppose one can't help likes and dislikes," she told herself at last, "and if Trina wasn't here, I might make something of her."

CHAPTER THE NINTH

A BROAD HINT

Sally Brendan had spent so much time and care over her imitation of Peter's handwriting that she was a day late in finishing her own lines.

"I couldn't manage to get them done quicker," she muttered sullenly as, giving them in, she was met by an angry glance instead of the curt acknowledgment she felt they at least deserved.

"Why on earth not? Because you didn't choose, you lazy little beast, I suppose? And the writing is hardly legible, as it is."

Sally shifted from one foot to the other, her hands clenched. She hated and despised Poppy Bristow, and it was a great effort to submit to her bullying words in

silence. The elder girl, on the other hand, found, for the first time, a little relief for her wounded vanity in being able to abuse someone else in safety. Lashed by the tongues of fellow-prefects, she had not dared to accuse or condemn the real culprit, and had suffered in secret, till now, like a flood released, her indignation poured itself out over the unpopular new girl, who had helped Trina Morrison to humiliate her before the Juniors.

"It's a perfect disgrace, the way the rules are broken nowadays at Seascape House," she concluded her harangue; "and I, at any rate, don't intend that prefects' orders shall be disregarded in future. I said if you didn't get those lines done by Wednesday, I would have to report you to Miss Cockran, and Heaven knows that I have a good mind to do it. It would serve you right."

Sally had borne a great deal, more than she had ever stood from those in authority before; but now her patience gave way, and she laughed aloud mockingly.

"Then I suppose it would serve Peter right as well? . . . Miss Cockran will find out about Peter coming in late, if I am sent to her. You can bet your money on that: and I don't know if that will please you—it will make Peter mad all right."

Poppy flushed a deep purple. "What do you mean?" she demanded. "What does it matter to me how mad Trina Morrison may get?"

Sally smiled slightly, as if that answered the question, before she added: "Well, do you want me to go to Miss Cockran?"

The prefect gripped her by the shoulders, and Sally thought she would have shaken her or struck her; but with a great effort she partly preserved her self-control.

"You—you impudent little b-beast," she stammered; "I don't know what you mean—b-but I won't be t-talked to like this. You will do me another 300 lines by the end of the week. 'Ev-v-angeline' . . . they are long ones. See?"

"Yes," said Sally sullenly, "all right."

It had suddenly occurred to her that, after all, she herself did not wish to go to Miss Cockran and betray Peter; and that Poppy Bristow, if goaded too far, might send her there without calculating the cost. The only thing was to give in, with as good a grace as possible; but again, as many times since she had come to Seascape House, the new girl wished she had held her tongue, and not been such a fool as to burden herself with more "lines" and a new enemy. She guessed that the wound she had given to Poppy Bristow's pride would not be forgiven easily.

"Not that I care, of course," she muttered, as she pulled down a copy of Longfellow from the library shelf, and carried it to her desk.

The worst of it was, she did care. As she sat scribbling wearily, she could see Trina Morrison walking in the garden below, arm in arm with Mabel Gosson and Cathy Manners. They looked so utterly care-free that, for the moment, Sally was tempted to tip her inkpot over them, out of the open window, as they strolled below.

"It would serve them right, selfish cads," she said; but did not act on the impulse, as she would have done a few months ago at home. She was beginning to learn that her second thoughts were sometimes best.

The lines were finished by tea-time on Saturday, and Poppy received them with a grudging: "Is that 300? It doesn't look more than two."

"Three hundred—yes. It was what you wanted, wasn't it?" asked Sally politely.

The prefect gave a grunt—whether of disgust, or assent, it was difficult to say. It was obvious that she would have liked to return the lines for correction; but the younger girl, foreseeing this, had taken pains to make them both tidy and clear.

"If they are all right, I suppose I can go?" she said at last; and as the other turned her back without answering, made off across the quadrangle after Trina Morrison, whom she saw in the distance.

"I have just had to do 300 more lines, for cheeking Poppy, you know."

There was slight importance in her tone, and Trina Morrison's eyebrows lifted.

"Was it worth it?"

"Hardly, I suppose; but she is such an ass that I couldn't resist pulling her leg."

"My dear child, if you start cheeking every ass in the school you will have your work cut out."

"Oh, well—I shan't do it any more—not till next time."

They had reached the gymnasium by now, and conversation showed signs of languishing. Sally looked hurriedly round to see that they were alone, then caught her friend's arm.

"Peter," she said, "look here. I . . . I didn't mean to boast that other evening. It was just, I had taken such a lot of trouble to hit off your handwriting exactly; and it's not an easy job, really, truly, it isn't."

The other laughed.

"Why, kid, of course it isn't. I believe forgers must take a special university course in handwriting, and I was uncommonly grateful—all that sort of thing. It was just, I couldn't resist ragging you—I always rag my friends—but you are such a tinder-box. Mabel Gosson, now, is like an indiarubber ball—in, when you poke, and out again—none the worse."

Sally's eyes glowed. So Peter did number her amongst her friends. Nothing else mattered, at the minute.

"I didn't mind a bit really, from you," she said valiantly. "It was the others standing round and laughing I couldn't bear. It made me mad angry."

"Turkey-Cock-sure. Isn't that what Doris Forbes calls you? It is quite smart of her, considering she is one of the worst asses this house boasts."

Sally secretly liked Doris, and began, rather half-heartedly, to object to this sweeping criticism.

"Why, she is awfully good at cricket, you know."

"And so are you, aren't you? You have often told me so, and sometimes street boys are; and lunatic asylums, I believe, produce quite creditable elevens." The younger girl flushed. "I daresay cricket for girls is all very well, just while one is at school. Personally, I like tennis much better, don't you? It often makes a good excuse for parties."

This was so novel an idea that Sally opened her eyes wide.

"I don't understand you sometimes. Why, tea-parties are awful rot—sitting about in best clothes, I mean."

"Oh, yes, in best school-clothes, of course."

This was equally baffling; but while Trina stood laughing, without attempting to explain her meaning, Mabel Gosson appeared.

"I want to talk to you, Peter," she said, and glared coldly at Sally.

"All right. Come to our Form sitting-room. So long, kid. Don't get any more lines, or you will have a red nose from leaning over the ink-pot."

"But you will let us have a talk again some time soon? I have just heaps to say to you."

"Yes, of course."

There was a hint of impatience in Peter's tone, and Sally dared not keep her longer, but wandered off, rather forlornly, to the cricket ground. They were just picking up sides for the Eagles when she arrived, but though she walked up and down close to the pitch, Doris Forbes took no notice of her; and when the sides were finally chosen, she was forced to go away.

"Try shrimping!" jeered one of those to whom she had once offered unsought advice; and as she turned her back, pretending that she did not hear, she came face to face with Violet Tremson.

"Hullo!" said Violet quickly. "Doing anything now?"

"No."

"Well, you said you would practise me at the nets one evening."

Sally hesitated. Last time they had spoken had been in the sea, and she herself had been violently rude.

"Do you want to play, really?" she mumbled, somewhat suspicious that there was a trap set to catch her, and make a fool of her, though she could not quite detect it at the moment.

"Rather. I seem to be stuck in the Wolves and Bears for life, and batting is quite my worst show. Doris Forbes says my style is simply awful; but then I have no brothers to coach me, you see."

"It was my Uncle Frank who taught me at the beginning. He used to play for Yorkshire."

Sally's face brightened as she spoke, and by the time they reached the nets they were both discussing the averages of their favourite champions. Then they fell to work, and it was with regret that they heard the school bell ring, and went to pick up their coats.

"You will do quite well if you hit out a bit more," said Sally. "I am too rash, and you are too careful. You rather poke at balls, you know."

"Well, if I try to slog, the ball always gets me middle stump and that damps my courage—especially when someone calls out: 'How could you be so careless? Who do you think you are? W. G. Grace, or Plum Warner?'"

The other laughed.

"A short life and a merry one is my motto, and like the old miller, 'I don't care for nobody'—nor what 'nobody says to me.'"

They had reached the school-house by now, and passed Trina Morrison standing in the hall. Sally waved to her, and she stared at them with a faint smile, but did not speak.

"Isn't Peter frightfully clever?" said the younger girl; "and such a sport—not afraid of anyone. I think she's the bravest person I ever met."

"Do you?"

At her dry tone, Sally turned in surprise. It was so unlike Violet Tremson's usual cheerful kindliness.

They were at the foot of the stairs that led to the upper floor, where conversation was forbidden, and both of them stopped involuntarily, facing each other.

"Of course she is brave. Do you mean you don't agree?"

Violet Tremson hesitated: then said very slowly:

"I don't care for Trina Morrison. I used to, you know—as you do. I admired her very much, but . . . well, later, I couldn't help seeing that she wasn't what I thought."

"You mean, you think I will change about her?"

"Yes—I hope you will. She is rather a rotter."

It was out now; and Violet accepted silently, though her face flushed, the indignant denial that she had expected. Any explanation of her point of view, or Sally's, was, however, cut short by the appearance of Miss Castle, who demanded why they were waiting about when the dressing bell had rung.

"You will be late for supper unless you hurry. Be off now, the pair of you."

They fled to their rooms; and while Sally changed, she meditated on Violet Tremson's verdict, deciding that she felt as she did because she was naturally "a slow old thing." Probably Peter hadn't bothered to know her, and she was hurt; though it was true that it didn't seem easy to hurt or annoy her. Sally suddenly remembered the scene in the water, and wished she had apologised for her rudeness. She had meant to do so, put it off, and then forgotten it. Now the opportunity was past.

"Anyhow, I'll make up for it by being really decent to her now," she said. "She can't help being a cousin of Mrs. Musgrave, and she has been jolly decent to me."

CHAPTER THE TENTH

THE BREACH WIDENS

It was nearing the end of the summer term, and continued measles at Seascape House had put an end to all hopes of a cricket season that included the outside world. In consequence, "Games" enthusiasm burned with so low a flame that Doris Forbes, for all her patriotic efforts, was quite unable to arouse any interest in matches between English *v.* Celts, Oxford *v.* Cambridge, or Lancastrians *v.* Yorkists. The matches were played—because, after all, something must be done to pass the time on Saturdays—but not even the yawning teams cared who won, or lost.

Sally Brendan cared least of anyone in the school, for Doris Forbes had continued to ignore her existence where the Eagles were concerned, and had not Violet Tremson drawn her into the struggle of Wolves and Bears, she might have been reduced once more to shrimping.

"I had rather do anything than play with those horrible little beasts again," she said to Peter one Saturday afternoon, as they lay on a rug under the oak trees; and her companion smiled lazily.

"Rather be expelled?"

"Much. I wouldn't mind being expelled from this place, as I said before. Would you?"

"I may be reduced to it for a new experience. This leper sort of isolation is getting on my nerves."

"Well, you are luckier than I am, for you can play tennis almost any evening—and you quite like that."

It was, indeed, the one game that Trina Morrison treated with any kind of toleration; and when she chose to exert herself, she had a good eye and a steady wrist that made her quite an average player. Thanks to her friends amongst the seniors, who controlled the use of the courts, she could count on a set almost any evening; and what made Sally marvel was the little joy or interest she took in such opportunities.

This afternoon, for instance, just because she knew Miss Rogers had gone away for a week-end, and could not therefore force them to take some exercise, she had refused to join in an American tournament, preferring to recline instead under the trees with a novel.

Sally was surprised but pleased, because it meant that she could go and sit with her, while she waited for her innings as a Wolf, in a not very exciting tussle with the languid Bears.

Violet Tremson, also a Wolf, was batting at the moment, playing steadily and carefully, but with more "dash" than earlier in the season, and the younger girl watched her with approval.

"She's a lot better since I took her in hand, isn't she?" Sally said at last.

"Who?"

"Why, Violet Tremson. We have been practising at the net, and now she stands up to my bowling quite well. Some day she will be in one of the elevens."

Peter yawned. She was reading a letter that lay between the pages of her book, and did not look up.

Sally pulled her suddenly by the arm.

"Peter, do leave that letter for a minute, and pay attention—I want to know something. What do you really think of Violet Tremson?"

"I never think of her at all."

"Yes, but if you did? I want to know badly, please."

"Well, then, I would probably think her a good little girl—almost too good to be true."

At the obvious sneer the younger girl's look of curiosity deepened.

"That means you dislike her; and she doesn't like you either—and yet I like you both. Isn't that odd?"

"Well, which do you care for most?"

The tone was lazy, but there was a gleam of interest in the half-closed eyes. Trina was not quite as indifferent to admiration as she often seemed.

"Oh, Peter. Can you ask? You, of course. You were my first friend here. Violet is a good sort, but when I'm with her I feel as if I was drinking just ordinary water, while you are like something that's exciting, and fizzes—ginger ale, perhaps."

"Say champagne—it's not so cheap."

"But I don't like champagne. Uncle Frank used to give it to me when I lived with him, and it's all dry—and burns."

"You don't know but that I may turn out like that. I'm not at all a good friend for you, kid."

"Rot!"

Sally looked so indignant that the other laughed.

"Well, your dear Violet told me so—in fact she asked me to leave you alone."

"What?"

"Oh, I endured quite a sermon on the subject of corrupting the young, I assure you. She told me I wasn't being fair to a child like you, and seemed to think I was dragging you into mischief."

"You didn't drag me. Why, it was I who suggested going to Parchester that afternoon—and anyhow, it is none of her business."

"She seemed to think so. I suppose the poor thing has the missionary spirit, and can't help herself. She sees you going to the dogs, for instance, and must start off with a chain to drag you back."

Again there was the sneer, but this time Sally was too angry to notice it. Her cheeks were hot with humiliation at the idea of being "taken up" for her good by Violet, and "saved."

"I call it the most frightful cheek I ever heard," she said at last.

"On the contrary, it is painstaking and unselfish with such a thornbush as you are. In time, she may turn you into a respectable member of the school, with high ideals of duty—like Doris Forbes."

"I don't want to be respectable, or done good to." Sally's eyes were flashing now. She sprang to her feet, and dug viciously at the ground with her bat, to relieve her feelings.

"You ought to have told me before," she said. "When you saw us beginning to make pals. You know I wouldn't stand her jawing at you about me, as if she were my godmother—or someone odious and interfering like that. . . . I . . . just won't stand it. It's beastly cheek."

"It may have been cheek, my child, but she was probably right. I don't know that I mean to stay here much longer."

"Peter, tell me, are you planning anything risky?"

Sally had seen her glance again at her letter, as she spoke, and had a sudden intuition that some new adventure was on foot.

Trina Morrison smiled.

"Almost as clever as Sherlock Holmes, and too clever for Seascape House. Well, what if I am?"

"I want to come too . . . I must."

"I daresay; but I shan't take you, all the same. Violet may be a sanctimonious prig, but she's right about you and me. You are too young for more adventures at present."

The elder girl lay back and watched the other with teasing eyes as she spoke—only shaking her head at the furious protestations her announcement aroused.

In the midst of them Violet Tremson appeared, tranquil as usual.

"I made twenty-three," she said, "and then fell to a catch—a neat little donkey-drop sort of beast—straight into Hilda Collet's hands. I came to say you are next in, after Maisie."

Sally said nothing; then, as the other waited, answered gruffly, turning her back: "All right—but I'm talking to Peter now."

Violet flushed, and her eyes as they met Trina Morrison's showed a little flame of anger.

"Don't go," said Trina sweetly. "We were just discussing you. I was just telling Sally that I thought you had gone out of your way to take a lot of trouble about her, and that she wasn't nearly grateful enough."

"What do you mean, Trina?"

"She means," broke in Sally furiously, "that you have been trying to patronise me, and do me good. I suppose that old toad, Mrs. Musgrave, put it on your conscience before I came."

"She didn't, Sally. Don't be an ass."

"Well, anyway, you tried to break off my friendship with Peter, and that was none of your business."

Violet Tremson pushed the younger girl aside, and stood looking down at the elder with contempt and indignation in her eyes.

"So you have been telling her what I said, have you?"

"Certainly. Since you preached to me before the whole Lower Fifth, I imagine it wasn't meant to be private."

"How dared you talk about me before all those cads?" Sally was trembling with rage; and Violet, it was evident, was having some trouble to keep down her own temper.

"Be quiet, Sally," she said; "you don't understand."

"But I do—and I don't want ever to be patronised by you again, thank you—I'll choose my own friends."

Trina Morrison, who had risen lazily to her feet, laughed.

"Turkey-Cock-sure, aren't you? You may be proud of her friendship some day," she said mockingly. "One never knows. Anyhow, stop gobbling, do, and go and bat. Maisie has just been bowled, and the whole field seems yelling for you."

"I don't care—they can burst if they like. I want Violet to understand what I feel."

"I think she does. You look wrathful enough to register displeasure and scorn in a cinema film. Anyhow, do go and bat, and I'll settle your final account with our mutual friend here."

Sally looked from one to the other, and with a great effort moved away towards the pitch.

"Don't imagine I want ever to make it up again," she called over her shoulder, and again Trina Morrison laughed; but her eyes were no longer amused, only shallow and hard.

"Well?" she asked, briefly.

Violet's hands were clenching and unclenching round the handle of her bat.

"I'm not clever enough to answer you," she said at last, in a low voice; "but you know what I think of you, and what a dirty game you have just played—poisoning Sally's mind. One day you will be expelled, and——"

"Probably, and the school saints will sing anthems of joy over one sinner cast into outer darkness."

"It will be for the good of the school—yes."

"And for the good of your darling Sally too, eh? We were talking about her, I think?"

Violet moved a little closer. "What I am afraid of is—that she may be expelled too. She is not the first child you have done your best to ruin, by dragging her into rows. If you do, just remember this, I shall go to Miss Cockran and tell her how much is your fault, and not Sally's. She would run straight if you let her alone."

"You will turn sneak, in fact—is that it? My dear girl, you will make yourself popular."

"I know—I hate sneaks; but sometimes things have to be stopped, and Doris Forbes' brain works so slowly that she doesn't see them."

"Well, it will be amusing to hear how Old Cocaine welcomes you. I don't fancy it will be with approval. Not even a prefect, are you?"

Trina laughed as she spoke, and picked up her hat.

"Tut, tut. What a fuss, and all about a little whipper-snapper in the Remove. I'm quite exhausted. Do get out of my way. Oh, bother! There's the child herself coming; she must have been bowled at once."

Violet did not stir. "I'm not just fussing, Trina," she

said, "I mean it. Leave Sally alone, or I shall spoil your game."

They looked straight into one another's eyes, and then Violet turned and walked off, without a glance at the younger girl, who, bat in hand, had come rushing up to join them.

"What have you both been saying? Tell me, Peter. . . . I sent a catch at once, when I saw you were still talking."

Trina Morrison shrugged. There was a smile round her mouth, but it lacked its usual charm; and her eyes were hard, under brows drawn together in a frown.

"Let us forget your missionary," she said petulantly, at last. "She goes nearer to making me lose my temper than anyone else in this place. Dull as water, you call her—I say, as 'ditchwater.'"

"Then give me—some champagne."

Sally looked significantly at the letter crumpled up in the elder girl's hand; and Trina, following her glance, hesitated perceptibly.

"Well, why not?" she said. "Since Violet has dared me and it's your risk, remember—my adventure, at least, was planned for myself alone."

"Oh, Peter, do tell me quick."

They were moving towards the house now, and Trina Morrison's frown had cleared away.

"It's from Austin—the letter—" she said. "He and the others want to meet me at Parchester Fair next Wednesday."

"How scrumptious! I love a Fair. But what time? They will spot we are up to something at once, if we don't go to prep., won't they?"

"Silly! this is an evening affair, when good little schoolgirls are in their beds. Why, anything of that sort is no fun in the day. Besides, there is to be a dance. . . . I forgot that . . . you are rather young for a dance. It's with some friends of Austin, in Parchester."

"I can either dance or look on," said Sally calmly.

"You promised you'd take me, Peter. I won't be a nuisance."

"I believe it would be best, if you didn't go—all the same," muttered the other. "I should be leaving here in two terms, anyhow, you see; but it's different for you."

It was difficult to tell from her expression whether a belated attack of conscience or a fear that the younger girl might indeed be in the way was troubling her most.

Sally slipped her arm through Trina's ingratiatingly. "Don't worry about my being expelled," she said; "I don't want to stay here when you are gone."

In the excitement of the moment, she believed this true, and, touched by the passion of affection in her voice, Peter slipped her arm round her.

"Nice kid," she said; "but you know it is a mistake to put all your eggs in one basket. I never do."

"You have so many friends," said Sally, a trifle wistfully, "and I have so many enemies"; adding, in her usual tone of bravado, "but of course I don't care about that."

"No?" said the other, a little mockingly. "Are you quite sure? If not, it would be a pity to get expelled."

"I tell you, I don't care," answered Sally obstinately. "And I'm going to the Fair. What about plans?"

They went into the house discussing them.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH

A NIGHT ADVENTURE

It was Wednesday evening. Sally Brendan lay in her bed, with her eyes closed, and the sheet drawn up almost to her nose. Yet she was very far from being asleep; and had anyone turned back the clothes they would have seen that, instead of a nightdress, she wore gym. knickers, and a jersey that belonged to one of her brothers, which she had insisted on packing in a corner of her trunk because it was certain to come in useful.

She giggled softly to herself, as she thought of her appearance, and Peter's last whispered instructions as they came out of Chapel:

"For Heaven's sake, child, remember that whatever you wear, it must be something that doesn't give us away! I don't want anybody at the Fair saying that you came from Seascape House."

"Right oh! Old Cocaine herself would hardly know me," she had whispered back, and hurried off, for fear her friend should question her further and raise objections: she might even at the last minute refuse to take her.

Trina Morrison had been in a very uncertain mood since the scene between them on the cricket field; for the most part, irritable and impatient. Several times she had hinted that, on reflection, she felt sure it would be wiser for Sally not to come; and when that young lady had maintained, "But I am going anyhow—it's no use trying to stop me now," she had warned her that she might have to return alone.

"You see, you are much too juvenile for this sort of a dance, really, and I can't be bothered to act nursemaid. Why, I never meant to bring you into the show at all, until that ass Violet Tremson began to threaten me, and then I felt I must—just to annoy her."

"To threaten you with what?"

"Why, expulsion, of course. She said if I didn't reform my ways, especially with regard to you, she would expound my sins to Old Cocaine."

"What a sneaking cad she is!"

In her heart Sally Brendan found it difficult to apply this description to Violet Tremson, but she was still sore and angry with her. It is said that any stick is good enough with which to beat a dog: besides, it seemed to mollify Peter.

"I dare say you wouldn't be happy here with this crowd when I am gone, and that's a matter of two terms more at most," she had said, in a more friendly tone; and Sally had answered:

"Of course not—I have told you so. I always meant to get expelled, from that first day on the beach."

If not strictly true, the sentiment sounded well, and allowed Trina to put away, with a shrug of her shoulders, any responsibility she might ever have felt.

"All right, then—9.45 sharp—at the landing window; and remember, I shan't hang about for you."

It was for the clock to strike 9.30 that the girl now anxiously waited.

Seascape House went to bed early. The Matron had made her last round of the passages, and Decima Pilldítch was snoring heavily, when Sally at last stole out of bed. By pulling to one side the curtain of her cubicle, she could focus the moonlight full on her looking-glass; and without delay she started on the final stage in her make-up.

It was quick and drastic: nothing less than the hacking off of the red curls that had made a fuzzy halo round her small freckled face. When it was completed, she was no longer bobbed, but shorn, and in her costume of knickers and jersey presented a very good picture of a street Arab of eleven or twelve.

The effect was magnificent, but something of a shock in its transformation—even to Sally herself; and she began to wonder how Peter would approve of the disguise—completed by a large hole in the back of her stocking, which she suddenly discovered, and had no time to draw together.

"I will keep on my cap and coat until we leave the garden," she told herself, rather guiltily; and thus wrapped up, opened the door, stole along the passage, and down the back stairs to the landing window.

It was open, and at first she thought that her friend had gone without her; but as she peered out, she heard a voice whisper:

"Come! Do be quick."

And climbing through the opening, she found herself alongside Trina, on the flat roof of the corridor, that ran round three sides of the gymnasium.

Without looking at her, Trina inserted a large wedge of wood between the window and the sash, then pulled the lower pane down to meet it.

"No one is likely to notice that, and we shall be able to lift it all right when we return," she whispered. "But now, follow me and be quiet. We have to crawl along just below the mistresses' windows, stooping, in case they are there—but I think they are all in the sitting-room at this hour. When we come to Miss Castle's, there's a pipe down to the ground, and two bricks out in the wall, where one can put one's feet."

She started off, pulling her dark coat tight round her, and Sally followed, her eyes dancing with excitement. Most of the mistresses' windows were shut, but Miss Castle's was half open, with a curtain blowing slightly in the wind, though there was no light showing.

Trina made a grimace at the blank space, and shook her fist playfully; then began to lower herself over the edge of the roof. Her feet scraped along the pipe before they found their foothold, and Sally, at the noise, caught her breath; but there was no sound from the room above.

"She is not in there yet," the girl decided; and seeing the light in Miss Cockran's study at the end of the passage, wondered idly if she had gone along there.

"Jawing about us in our little beds to Old Cocaine," she said, and giggled as she began her own descent. It was hastened by a sudden flash of electric light in Miss Castle's room, just as she found her first foothold, and thereupon she lowered herself with a rapidity that nearly sent Trina Morrison, just below her, backwards into a flower bed.

"Young ass!" whispered Trina. "You will make me dirty my evening dress."

"'Ware Castle!" Sally returned, and they flattened themselves against the wall in the shadows, as they heard a voice from above call sharply,

"Who's there?"

Again the question was repeated, and as if in response

"'WARE CASTLE!"

two cats emerged from a bush and fled across the grass, one of them miawing loudly.

This seemed to satisfy Miss Castle, for she partially closed her window, and they heard the curtain drawn across. Keeping to the shadows, they crept along the flower beds till they turned the corner of the house, and came out on the grass of the tennis lawns, from whence they made their way into the shrubberies. No word was said until they had climbed into the tree, with branches overhanging the wall, that Sally knew from her previous adventure.

"I'd better leave my things here, hadn't I?" she whispered. "It's frightfully warm, and my overcoat is a school one"; but the elder girl, without answering beyond a nod of agreement, was already scrambling down the rough stonework, with the aid of a rope she had pulled out of the trunk and hung over a strong branch.

Sally followed her as quickly as she could, but with her shorter legs the drop was not so easy to manage, and Trina was walking rapidly down the road by the time she reached the ground.

"Are you going at that pace all the way to Parchester?" she panted, as she caught her up. "Anyhow, it's no good —we shan't be there before midnight."

"No, silly! The Fair is on the heath, on this side of the town, and anyhow, I have ordered a car at the Black Bull."

There was something very impressive to Sally's ears in the carelessness of her companion's tone, and as she undid her coat in the warm night air, and it fell back, revealing a pretty silk dress, the younger girl gave a gasp of admiration and distress.

"Why, you are most frightfully smart," she said. "I don't know whatever you will think of me."

"Good Golliwogs!"

Trina had turned her round towards the moon, and was staring at her, her own face in the shadows, so that Sally could not tell what she felt.

"You told me to disguise myself," she said half defiantly, expecting anger or scorn—anything but her companion's sudden outburst of laughter.

"My good child! Well, you have cut the painter—you are done for now with Old Cocaine."

"Lost by a narrow shave, instead of escaped by it," said Sally, greatly relieved. "Anyhow, no one at the Fair could possibly recognise me, could they?"

"I should say your own mother wouldn't—when you are returned to her, to-morrow."

Sally's rising spirits received a dash of cold water at the rejoinder. In a flash she suddenly remembered how Mrs. Brendan had begged her not to get expelled, and how she had promised she would try to stop at school. Standing outside the private door of the Black Bull, while Trina Morrison hammered with the knocker, she shuffled her feet uncomfortably, and tried to put out of her mind her mother's eyes, and her consciousness of the furious superior glance that Cecilia would give her, when she turned up once more like a bad penny. After all, she decided, there was no need for them to be caught. Peter had done this kind of thing before, quite safely, and cutting off one's hair was not an unpardonable crime, taken by itself.

"Oh, shut up shuffling, do," she heard the elder girl say. "I want to listen. They are all asleep, or I shall have to go to the public bar, and find someone. It's perfectly disgusting."

At this moment the door flew open, and a man with a red face appeared. He was in his shirt sleeves, with a coat over his arm, which he began to put on while he spoke—leering at them with a disagreeably familiar smile.

"All right, Missie. I booked the order true enough, but I tell you straight I don't fancy it. Thinking it over, after the young gentleman had bin here, I says to myself, 'It will as good as get me sacked, it will, if I'm found out—and that's not exactly a cheering sort of notion for a poor man.'"

"My cousin arranged with you to drive me to the opening of the Fair for ten shillings—an order is an order, isn't it?"

"That's what he said, Miss, and I'm never one to overcharge, especially a young lady like yourself; but it's so risky, I don't see as how I can, for the money. 'Don't you have nothing to do with it,' says my wife, 'or that there female up at the school-house will get you sacked.'"

"Nonsense!" said Trina angrily. "Why, it is ridiculous to talk of 'sacking.' How could Miss Cockran do it? She has never employed your cars for years—said you were impudent, or something—so you won't even lose her custom."

The man's smile was not so affable now, and there was an angry glint in his eyes, though his tone was still oily.

"You seem to know the ways of my business better than I do, Missie—leastways, it's the first I've ever heard of being impudent—but just you think of this now; I ain't out skylarking like you and that young boy, if he belongs to your party, but earning of my living—and I don't take no risks."

"How much do you want, and are you prepared to start at once? I must be there by 10.15."

Trina looked impatiently at her wrist-watch in the moonlight, and the man continued to smile, but with his hand half over his mouth, as though to conceal what was almost a grin.

"Not to disappoint a young lady, Missie, I'd go at—say, thirty shillings, I would."

They fixed it finally at a pound—Trina stamping angrily on the step as she concluded, saying:

"Well, be quick, can't you? I don't want to waste the whole evening."

He vanished, and as her glance fell on Sally, she frowned—no longer amused by her companion's ragamuffin appearance.

"Why, you look worse and worse," she said petulantly. "You ought to be picking up pennies on a London kerb.'

"I shall do all right for a Fair, then, shan't I?"

"Yes—but not for a dance—and that's what I'm really going to."

"Well, I'm not. I expect I'll trot back, after I have had enough of the Fair. I said I probably should, so you needn't worry."

Sally saw the elder girl was ashamed of her, and felt hot and angry—especially at the look of relief with which her suggestion was received.

"I daresay that would be best. You'll be able to get up the wall by the rope, and the rest is quite easy."

At this moment the car rattled into view. It was very dusty and smelly, and took a great deal of winding up before it consented to crawl away along the road towards the heath. By the time it arrived, Trina, who glanced at her wrist-watch whenever a patch of moonlight allowed, was in a state of exasperated nerves with both driver and car, while Sally was secretly wishing herself back in bed.

This was not at all the joyous adventure she had imagined as she lay waiting for the clock to strike.

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH

SALLY AT THE FAIR

THE taxi pulled up on the outskirts of a large crowd, chiefly composed of men and boys. Sally, as she put her head out of the window, could see their dark figures outlined against a row of flaring lights.

The Fair was held in a field, surrounded on three sides by a thick hedge, on the other, by a canvas wall, eight or nine feet high. From inside rose the droning jangle of merry-go-rounds and the raucous voices of showmen and hawkers.

"Walk up, ladies! Walk up, gentlemen! Don't miss the most celebrated moving picture of the age," etc., etc.

Entranced by the interest of the scene before her, the girl stood as she had alighted from the car, and did not even notice it drive off, nor that her companion, after calling to her sharply, had moved away alone. When the jerk of someone's elbow in her ribs woke her at last from her dream of contemplation, it was to find herself engulfed in a group of Parchester rowdies, who were fighting their way towards the turnstile. Here, a negro with a red nose, and spots of white paint on his cheeks and forehead, stood beating a drum.

Nearly swept off her feet, Sally was thankful when she arrived inside; but her heart sank, as she saw no sign of Trina Morrison, who, she had fully imagined, would be waiting for her there.

"She knows I can take care of myself—and, of course, I can."

This was the first explanation she offered herself, cleverly turning neglect into a compliment; but it did not completely satisfy her judgment all the same. Rather a voice in another part of her brain kept whispering:

"It was beastly of her not to wait—I shall tell her so." But when, after a few minutes' desultory staring at the booths, she came upon Trina and her friends, she did not do so. Instead, she hung back in the shadow of a tent, overcome by shame as she realised the contrast between herself and this group of civilised merry-makers.

Girls in evening dresses, with light cloaks trimmed with fur; young men in black suits, with starched white shirt-fronts, and shining hair plastered across their foreheads—such were Trina's friends: while she, shock-headed and freckled, in her rough jersey, gym. knickers and torn stockings, belonged obviously to the little group of ragamuffin boys who were trying to insert their heads under the flaps of tents, or secure a ride on the merry-go-rounds for nothing.

At school, Sally had thought her costume a joke. Peter had laughed at it too, when she first saw her in the road,

though later, when waiting outside the Black Bull, she had frowned—Peter's moods were dreadfully uncertain. It would be horrible if she, Sally, were to step out and join the group, and then her friend were merely to stare at her, and say something uncomfortable in her cool drawl, that would make them all laugh.

"Stuck-up toads! I hate the lot of them!" the girl muttered, clenching her fists as she watched them throwing Houp-la rings. It seemed to her that Austin, as he handed the rings to his cousin, was staring beyond her mockingly, recognising the unwanted guest, but determined to cut such a disreputable-looking waif, at all costs.

In reality, Sally knew that he could not possibly distinguish her, at the distance she stood, from amongst the boys who leaped and screamed around her, in and out of the shadows made by the tents and booths; but the true soreness lay in the thought that Peter had probably forgotten to mention her at all, so that none of her companions was prepared either to welcome or to scorn her.

"I don't care—not a scrap!"

With the shrug of her shoulders that had often exasperated Mrs. Musgrave as the answer to a snub, Sally strolled away from the Houp-la. It was a silly game, she decided, that only won for the successful hideous china vases and trumpery brooches; she would go, instead, to a moving picture show.

The flaring lights on the platform outside one large tent showed parties of Japanese contortionists, black cats, and men struggling in mines, while a hideous bat, of monster size, flapped over their heads.

Sally was so thrilled by the bat that, for the moment, she forgot Trina, and even the school. It was fun to be a boy out on an adventure, and to wriggle her way through the crowd, with exasperated women tapping her on the head for her impudence, and old men abusing her as she trod on their toes. It was not such fun, however, when, nearing the entrance, she became wedged, just below the

platform, between a very stout woman and a bony soldier, who dug his elbows almost into the back of her neck.

The soldier's companion had a blue and yellow tickler, and thought it a great joke that the little crop-headed boy in front objected to having his face washed with it, and lost his temper when she persisted.

"Shut up!" said Sally fiercely.

To which the woman replied with a cheerful wink at her neighbours:

"None of your lip, Charlie, my boy, or my pal there will fetch you one on the mug—see if he don't."

"S'truth I will," said the soldier, with an air of great ferocity. "I'll spoil your beauty for you—there's not a few noses as I've laid flat with their faces, in my time."

And he dug with his elbows so sharply into Sally's neck that she became alarmed. After this, she endured the tickler in silence until they reached the foot of the steps up to the platform. It was as she struggled up there towards the tent doorway, past the man with the drum, that she discovered she had no money: someone in the crowd had picked her pocket.

"Pocket picked, you young varmint? You mean you'd like to wriggle in for nothing—I know your kind," said the man at the door, scowling, as a wave of people threw Sally almost on top of him, and he rose and thrust her roughly back.

Had not a clown, who had been turning somersaults on the platform to the accompaniment of the drum, caught her arm and pulled her into safety beside him, she would have fallen backwards down the steps, and probably have been trodden underfoot by those still fighting their way up.

The very thought made Sally feel sick, but it evidently struck the clown as a good joke, for he asked her loudly if she knew what happened to the grasshopper who chose to cross the road in front of a steam engine.

"It's not my fault—let me go," she said angrily. "I'm off home."

The clown, instead, picked her up and swung her to and fro in the air while he executed a clog dance.

"By, Baby Bunting," he chanted, while the man with the drum, and the Columbine, who stood on either side of him, laughed at this unrehearsed exhibition till the tears ran down their faces.

The humiliation was dreadful. Sally could not imagine how she would ever survive it if Trina and her party were to recognise her in such a position; but when at last the stream of people entering the tent had ceased, she was thankful, as she tore herself from the clown's grasp, that there was at least no sign of them.

Her one desire now was to get back to the school as quickly as she could. Keeping to the shadows, she made her way to the entrance, and with a sigh of relief found herself in a few minutes on the patch of heath outside.

Here, as she paused, uncertain in the darkness which way to turn, she was startled by a yelp of pain, and a puppy came running towards her. It was a mongrel, mainly rough-haired terrier, with ridiculously long ears and a tufted tail. One of the ears was bloodstained, and the tail had a can tied to it, filled with stones.

"You poor little thing," said Sally, who loved animals; and she drew it close, while she bent down and began to untie the string.

"Garn!—leave it alone, can't yer? We are going a-hunting with it"—broke in an angry voice, and a big lad of fifteen, followed by a lot of smaller boys, crowded round her threateningly.

Sally finished untying the string, and looked up. She was trembling nearly as much as the dog, but she said quietly:

"No—you shan't do it any more. He is only a puppy—how can you be so cruel?"

"Quite the little gentleman," sneered one of them, in mock admiration of Sally's voice; while a boy about her own age came up to her, and, doubling his fists, brought one nearly under her nose.

"Cruel! What d' yer mean? 'e's my pup. Can't I drown 'im or tease 'im, if I likes?"

The others laughed and jeered, as, involuntarily, the girl drew back. There were shouts of:

"Go it, Stan!—You're the bruiser. Give the little cad a black eye."

Sally went very pale. She had boxed a little with her brothers, but this was quite a different proposition.

"Let him go, please," she faltered. "He is so frightened."

"Scared as you," retorted Stan briefly. "I'll tie the can on to you as well as 'im, if you don't clear off." And he bent to seize the puppy by its rope collar.

Sally could feel the terrier tremble against her legs, and as she heard it yelp in sudden pain, her fear vanished, and only burning anger remained. Leaning across the dog, she hit Stan hard on his nose, sending him reeling backwards in surprise.

"Take that, you cowardly brute," she said.

In an instant a ring was formed, and Sally found she had partisans as well as enemies. There was an encouraging shout of "Go it, Carrots!" as she warded off a slashing blow from Stan and landed one herself on his jaw; but this was the utmost of her triumph. What the girl knew of boxing was not enough to defend her from a windmill attack of arms and legs that admitted kicking and stamping amongst its tactics.

But for the timely appearance of a policeman, attracted from the gateway by the noise, she would have fared badly indeed. As it was, when the rest had fled, and he laid his hand on her shoulder, one eye was already closed, while she stood trying to stem with bleeding knuckles the tears that flowed from the other.

"Silly young hass, to start fighting at your age," said the policeman reprovingly, but with good-natured sympathy.

"'Ome you go now, sonny, and tell your ma to put raw beef on it. That's the stuff."

THE POLICEMAN PURSUED FOR A FEW YARDS

"The puppy?" gasped Sally, between her tears. "I tried to save him—the brutes were hurting him."

"There weren't no sign of a puppy as I came up, so I guess he legged it all right," said the man, glancing at her curiously; then:

"Where's your 'ome, sonny?"

Sally's voice was strangely unlike that of the other urchins, whose pranks had made his evening duty at the Fair a burden; and a suspicion began to dawn that she might belong to a preparatory school in Parchester. This was more than confirmed, when "sonny," twisting out of his grasp, made off without returning any answer.

The policeman pursued for a few yards, but he was "fat and scant of breath," the heath had numberless gorse bushes to act as cover and the night was very dark.

"Drat the young brute!" he muttered at last, and stalked back towards the entrance of the Fair, with an air of dignified contempt, as though the quarry he had pursued was quite beneath his notice.

In the meantime "the young brute," bleeding from her eye and knuckles, lay and panted between two bushes, stifling her sobs as well as she could, until she was sure that the search after her had ceased. Ignominious as it must be in any case to return to Seascape House a figure of dirt and fun, it would have been beyond all words of horror to arrive in charge of a policeman. Cecilia had prophesied that her career would end in a reformatory; and Sally had a secret dread that this might indeed be her fate if once the police began to take an interest in her adventures.

For the moment, as the constable's broad back disappeared into the darkness, this immediate danger was removed; and Sally wept unrestrainedly, almost as much with relief as with pain.

Her head ached and her body felt a mass of bruises, but at least she was free, and had, as her brothers would have called it, "kept her end up," in the matter of the puppy. Their approving eyes seemed to rest upon her as at last she

stifled her sobs and, pulling herself stiffly to her feet, began to look around her.

The moon was behind the clouds, and in both directions the road lay like a white ribbon, cutting the darkness of the heath, save where the flaring gas-jets of the Fair flamed across it in a yellow patch. As she peered one way she saw a halo of light edging the horizon, and knew that this was Parchester and that she must turn her back on it to reach Seascape House.

Utter blackness, but for the ribbon of road, lay the other way, and with a little shiver at the prospect, Sally, skirting the furze bushes and digging her hands deep into her pockets, began to run across the heath parallel with the road along which she and Trina had so lately driven.

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH

"JUST SILLINESS"

The road across the heath, when Sally joined it, lay white and clear for about half-a-mile; then scattered firs—wind-blown and bitten—began to appear, and after these a series of pine plantations that as the moon peeped from behind clouds threw their shadows across the sky like the vaulting in some great church.

So far, since she left the neighbourhood of the Fair, the girl had met no one save a solitary car that passed her with blinding lights; but it seemed to her that the wood was alive with strange night birds that brushed the branches above her head, or beasts that ran scurrying through the undergrowth. It was this feeling of being watched, while she could not see, that kept her, in spite of her bruises, running at almost breathless speed; but, exhausted at last, she sank down on a bank beside a ditch, where the road lay open and clear between two clumps of pines.

At once she became conscious of how much her eye had

swollen, and putting her poor bruised hands together over it, she sat huddled up, with her elbows resting on her knees. How long she remained there she did not know; but suddenly she rose to her feet and screamed—something had touched her, something soft and wet.

She looked down, and saw it was the mongrel dog, to whose rescue she had come at the Fair. Now, almost as frightened as she had been, he crouched at her feet, slowly wagging his tufted tail, and begging with abject eyes that she would not kick him or send him away. He had lovely brown eyes (mongrels often have) and Sally, forgetting her own hurts, drew him up into her arms, and began to kiss him, while he responded with frantic licks and little whines of satisfaction.

"I love you, puppy, I love you," she whispered, and became indifferent to the loneliness of her surroundings. With what was almost a swagger she put him down at last, and continued her homeward road—this time at a pleasant stroll. She even found courage to laugh at the predicament in which she had landed herself—made worse as it was by this new witness to her naughtiness.

"Friend pup," she said, as he ran joyously beside her, leaping occasionally to lick her hand—"Friend pup, I very much fear that I am in the soup, and you will put the lid on that soup. Never mind, life is no longer dull, and we shall make a fine exit from Seascape House together."

This boast brought her thoughts back with a jerk to Trina Morrison and her friends. How long had she herself lain among the gorse bushes? Perhaps the dance was over, and Austin having already dropped his cousin at the school wall, she was safe in her bed.

If so, would she think of Sally and wonder what had become of her and whether she had also returned in safety?

It was a difficult question to answer, and the girl shuffled over facing it. In her heart, she knew it was quite possible

Peter would continue to forget her if it was inconvenient to remember; but she pushed that thought away with a sop to her vanity.

"Anyhow, she knew I was the kind of person who could take care of myself; besides, she warned me of all the risks, so it's not her fault, whatever may happen to me."

This seemed the best conclusion of the matter. If you are faintly conscious that your idol's feet are clay, it is best to leave them decently covered; so Sally gave up speculating about Trina, and began to wonder instead, as she drew near Seascape House, how she should make her entrance, and explain either her own appearance, or the dog. She did not look forward to a cross-examination on how she had spent the evening, by Old Cocaine.

Turning down the lane, she stood for a few minutes gazing irresolutely at the high wall, under the hanging tree. There was the rope that would help her up—within reach, if she jumped—but she knew that her bruises would not let her do this, even if she could solve the problem of how afterwards to lift up the dog.

No, she must turn back, and enter boldly by the front avenue, as though that were the way by which she had left; and thus, when stopped (as she surely would be, and questioned), she would not be in danger of betraying Trina's secret.

This decision made, she called to the puppy, and returned once more to the high road, where a few yards' further walking revealed a new obstacle. The gates were locked, and their iron spikes rose mockingly above her, as she gazed through the bars at the drive.

"I suppose it will be a case of waking 'Ma Jakes' at the lodge," she muttered; but at this minute the puppy, who quite realised his new mistress's desire to enter the forbidden garden, discovered a way in for himself by a ditch at the side of the raised drive. That it was not a large enough opening for Sally, he, however, failed to grasp, and began to whine and bark encouragingly from the other side,

only raising his voice a little louder when she whispered to him to be quiet.

"That settles it," said the girl, and with a sudden impulse not to be caught begging for an entrance, began to climb the iron-work; but the exertion was so great that by the time she had pulled herself over the spikes, the sweat was running down her face. Trembling all over at the strain, she rested before she began the descent, and suddenly heard the dog growl.

As she looked over her shoulder, she saw a light approaching down the drive.

With a little cry of panic, she hastened her movements, caught her foot between the bars, released it, and then fell to the ground, doubling it beneath her. The pain this time was far worse than her swollen eye, or any of her bruises; and as the puppy ran to lick her face, she pushed him away —moaning a little.

"Who are you? What are you doing here? Why—it is a boy and a dog."

Sally opened the eye that was not swollen, and saw by the light of an electric torch, Miss Castle, her Form mistress, bending over her. In a flash she remembered the open window as they climbed down from the roof, and a voice calling out to them. It was evident they had aroused Miss Castle's suspicions, and that at the sound of a dog barking she had come out to see what was wrong.

"Oh, I'm so glad it is you," the girl whispered. "You won't be angry with the puppy, will you? It is not his fault."

The other stared at her, at first blankly amazed, and then with dawning surprise and horror.

"Sally!" she said. "Sally Brendan?" And then—"Oh, my poor child, what has happened to you?"

"My foot . . . the pain. . . ."

Sally tried to move as she spoke, and fainted. When she was able to realise her surroundings again, she was lying on two chairs in the lodge kitchen; and "Ma Jakes," a fat

woman with her hair in curlers, was trying to blow the embers into a blaze. Miss Castle was writing a note at the table.

"Take this to the sanatorium at once," she said as she finished to a man in the doorway, who, Sally knew, must be Jakes, the gardener—only he looked so odd in a shabby dressing-gown, with the legs of his pyjamas falling over his boots, and his matted hair standing wildly on end.

"Where is the puppy?" asked Sally, as Miss Castle came towards her, and at this minute he made his presence known by a yelp, as he retreated under the table before a large angry cat.

"Eating the poor thing's supper, 'e was," said Mrs. Jakes resentfully; "'e ought to be drowned, 'e ought."

She was angry at being dragged out of her bed, "because," so she put it to herself, "of the mischieviousness of one of them dratted noosances of girls."

"It's just—he's so terribly hungry," said Sally. And her voice trembled because her foot hurt her so much, and her swollen eye nearly as badly.

"I . . . fought a boy to save him from being hurt, and I don't want him scolded or drowned."

She looked entreatingly at Miss Castle, who seemed to understand, for she drew the dog over and patted him gently.

"All right, Sally—he shan't be hurt, and I will get him some food myself. Don't try to talk any more, child."

She slipped her arm behind the cushion on which the girl's head was resting and raised her a little. Sally lay quite still, and gazed at the tin canister on the mantelpiece in which Mrs. Jakes kept her tea. She found herself concentrating on its shininess, and wondering how it had got its two dents, because she knew she must think of something, or the pain would become unendurable, and she would cry like a baby. It was no use at all to consider explanations or what it was best to say to Miss Cockran, for her head was altogether too stupid to form a connected story.

When at last she did see the Headmistress, it was only for a minute, in what afterwards seemed a kind of dream, with a white-capped nurse standing in the background.

Sally found herself saying, "I'm sorry," as she met the searching grey eyes, and though they did not smile they were quite kind as they gazed down at her.

"That's right. I am glad you are sorry," Miss Cockran said. "But I don't want you to talk now, just to try to sleep. Later on you shall tell me everything."

She was turning away when Sally clutched at her arm.

"Miss Cockran," she said; "Please . . . the puppy . . . he is such a darling, and it's not his fault—you will be kind to him?"

This time the Headmistress smiled.

"He has just had a large bowl of bread and milk, and Miss Castle and Nurse Baker are putting some ointment on his ear. He is quite happy; so lie quiet, child, and don't worry any more about him."

Sally tried to lie quiet, but her foot was very painful, and her whole body ached. Even when she fell asleep she did not seem able to forget the pain; but woke up in a panic, dreaming that boys were pelting her with stones.

"You have had a slight touch of fever, but you will be all right now, if you are good," the white-capped nurse told her some days later, but when Sally demanded leave to get up she shook her head.

"Why, you will have to keep that sprained ankle of yours up for some time—there's a nasty swelling."

Sally had very rarely been "laid up." On the few occasions when it did occur, the whole of her family had combined to amuse her and keep her quiet; because her mother said it would be bad to allow her to become over-excited. Even so, she had been peevish and not particularly grateful.

Now, convalescence took on a very different note. For some days Sally saw no one but the Matron of the sanatorium, her nurse, and the old doctor who came to look at

her ankle. Occasionally she could hear the voices of those recovering from measles; but they were in another passage, and all communication with them was forbidden. Sally did not even know if they were aware of her presence in the building.

It was obvious that she was in disgrace—"a leper"—as she told herself bitterly, turning the pages of some magazines, which, with some Patience cards, were almost her sole means of passing the time. Occasionally Matron read to her; but her choice of books bored the girl, and she refused to be drawn on to school topics.

"Miss Cockran will tell you anything she wishes, when she has time to see you," was her final answer to Sally's frequent entreaties, and the girl's heart sank.

Left to herself, she lay and brooded over Trina Morrison's remark that, were they to run away and be caught, they would not be allowed to provide the school with even a few minutes' peep-show.

"I suppose it means expulsion," she told herself—and longed to know if Peter had escaped detection. It was maddening to think that when she did see Miss Cockran she could not inquire after her for fear of arousing suspicion.

It was a very sulky girl, outwardly calm, but really a good deal shaken, who faced her interview with the Headmistress. The account she gave of her adventures was of the barest.

"I heard there was a Fair—and I wanted to go. So I got out of the house and went: and as I was coming away, some boys were illtreating the puppy—and afterwards he followed me."

"Haven't you missed out that you fought the boys?" asked Miss Cockran quietly.

Sally flushed. Something had kept her from her usual boasting: indeed, when she remembered the fight, her feeling was rather of shame than pride.

"I put up a simply rotten show," she muttered.

"You fought pluckily, at any rate—and in a good cause. I am proud of that."

The girl found the tears rising to her eyes at this praise, and her sullenness began to vanish.

"I . . . I'm sorry about the rest now—I wasn't before . . . but . . . it's been horrible at school, and I didn't care——"

"You wanted to be expelled, you mean?"

Sally crumpled the edge of the counterpane between her hot hands.

"I did at one time. I'm not doing any good here that I can see."

"You have a good form record—top every week, I think. On the other hand, I hear you are untidy in the dormitory, and often rude to Matron, and Decima Pillditch."

There was no answer for some minutes, and then the girl said:

"I like the class work—it's interesting—I could do stiffer stuff."

"I know. You would have been moved up next term."

Sally's heart sank at that "would have been."

"Are you going to expel me?" she demanded suddenly.

Miss Cockran had been sitting very still on her chair beside the bed; but now she rose, and after looking down at the girl with her clear grey eyes for a few seconds, turned and paced the room.

"I don't know, Sally," she said, stopping at last. "Frankly, I can't decide. I hate expelling girls. It means such a stain on their career for always, and you are so young to start with that. Yet what you have done is quite impossible, and fully deserves the worst punishment school life knows."

Sally had begun to grow sulky again, and almost involuntarily her usual formula of disdain sprang to her lips:

"I don't care——"

The Headmistress had walked to the window, and was looking out, but she wheeled sharply as she caught the words.

"Do you mean it, child? If so, there is, of course, nothing more to be said—you will leave directly your foot

is well enough, and not come back here. But have you thought what expulsion stands for?"

"I've only been here one term, and . . ."

"Yes—one term—and that will be the end of your school life, at any rate, in England, I fear. Other schools will not be anxious to take you. Is it because you preferred home work so much, and living with your family, that you have done this reckless thing?"

There was so much real anxiety in Miss Cockran's voice as she asked the question, and her eyes, though grave, were so kind, that Sally felt the last of her outposts of defiance break down. At the same moment, she caught a vision of the schoolroom at home, and the boredom of lessons alone there, for all the years, until she grew up.

"It wasn't true, what I said just now," she burst out suddenly. "I do care—the other girls are hateful to me, and I'm very unpopular; but I like the work and the games, when I'm given a chance at them. I'd like to get a scholarship, and go on to College—Oxford—I know I could do it."

Miss Cockran nodded as if she understood.

"Then why . . . why this mad escapade?" she said at last; "I don't understand."

Sally flushed a deep red. It seemed as if Trina Morrison's share in the adventure was not known, and she, at least, had come back all right, undetected. Her spirits rose at the thought.

"It was just . . . just silliness——" she said at last. "I do mad things sometimes."

"Ah," said the Headmistress, "just silliness, . . . and it might have wrecked your life. If I had thought it deliberate naughtiness, and not, well—just silliness—I would have had no hesitation in thinking it my duty to expel you. A school cannot be run without discipline, any more than a ship."

Sally shifted her bad foot uncomfortably. She hated apologies, and usually skimmed over them as airily as

possible; but something told her that nothing but complete submission would be of any use on this occasion. With a great effort, she forced herself to look Miss Cockran in the face as she spoke.

"I . . . I'm really sorry, and would like to stay, if you'll have me—and I'll try to keep straight—keep the rules, I mean—in future. And . . . and I don't think it will do the discipline any harm if I stop, because everyone hates me so much that I couldn't have persuaded them to go to the Fair with me, even if I had wanted to—I mean, I'm not a bad influence—I'm just no influence at all."

In spite of herself, the Headmistress smiled at the last part of this confession.

"Poor Sally," she said. "There's a lot to learn at school besides lessons, isn't there?"

"No one gives me a chance . . . they all hate me . . . and——"

Miss Cockran put up her hand.

"Hush, Sally—think very carefully before you speak when you begin to say anything like that. Just remember this—that I am going to give you a chance now—suppose you give the others a chance next term."

She bent, kissed the girl and went quickly from the room.

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH

AUTOLYCUS

Sally Brendan saw no one belonging to the school during the remainder of her convalescence except Miss Cockran occasionally, and once Miss Castle, who came to tea with her. It was a red-letter afternoon, for Sally had been allowed up for the first time, with a crutch under her arm, to take the weight off her injured foot, and was able to establish herself in a cosy armchair in the window, from which she could command a view of the distant lodge and drive.

Down below, she could see some of the convalescents from measles walking arm in arm, or playing crazy croquet, on a lawn that was all bumps and slopes. The sound of good-natured squabbling, interspersed with many giggles and shouts, rose continuously; but though bored by her own society, the girl made no attempt to follow what was happening, or to attract attention. Rather, she pulled the curtain slightly forward so as to leave herself in the shadow.

A glance had told her that Peter, at any rate, had not found her way to the sanatorium group, and there was no one else in the school in whom she took the faintest interest: besides, when she hobbled across the room, she had passed a looking-glass, and, though vanity formed no part of Sally's conceit, the sight had given her something of a shock.

Her head might speak to a phrenologist in bumps of brains and determination, but to the ordinary observer it was, at the present moment, frankly ugly, with the short hair, that should have crowned it in curls, cut roughly, in odd, shaggy lengths. The injured eye was no longer swollen, but still rainbow-coloured; in fact, as Sally honestly told herself, she was a figure of fun, and when Miss Castle entered the room she looked up anxiously to detect a smile.

The smile was there; but it was friendly—not malicious—and Sally quickly forgot all about her own appearance when she saw the second visitor. For the moment she scarcely recognised the dirty cowering mongrel she had rescued in the well-brushed, rather self-assertive puppy who hurled himself on her knee and began frantically to lick her face.

"Why, he's quite handsome," she said, and Miss Castle laughed.

"I've told them so in the Common Room, but they won't believe me—except Miss Cockran—and she quotes, 'handsome is as handsome does,' because he caught a rat in the cellar last night."

"Oh, did he?—the angel! He is an angel dog, isn't he, Miss Castle?"

"I haven't found his wings yet—I fear he is a thief and a rascal—but he is a very attractive rascal, and has made me take more exercise in the last few days than in all the rest of the term, Sally."

Sally looked up quickly: she was amusing the puppy with the end of her dressing-gown tassel, and as she tried to prevent him from barking she said anxiously:

"Miss Castle, what is going to happen to him? I have not been allowed to get letters, or write home, but I know I can make Mother keep him, if I take him back with me; though if I ask her through the post my sister Cecilia will tell her to say 'No.' You see we have two dogs already."

"I sympathise with Cecilia, three dogs are too many in most houses."

"Well, you see, there are the boys and I who can always exercise them."

"Perhaps—in the holidays—but what about term time?"

Sally looked a little sulky. People always saw Cecilia's point of view: she was so dreadfully reasonable.

"Still, I shall take him home, all the same," she said obstinately. "When you rescue someone like that you can't just shut him out of your life, and forget him, as if he came to you in an ordinary way."

"No—I see that."

Miss Castle was sitting in the window seat and had drawn the puppy down on her knee, with her hand over his nose to make him be quiet.

"What do you say to his stopping here?" she added.

"Oh, Miss Castle! . . . What, in school?"

"No, Sally, I don't mean that. Why, if one girl started a pet we should have a menagerie—cats, rabbits, tortoises and monkeys—Oh, Heaven forbid!"

Sally laughed, in spite of her anxiety.

"Well, I don't understand, then. Matron wouldn't have

him in the san.: she's much too particular. The other day she told me cats were nasty dirty things that carried infection."

"I expect Miss Cockran would keep him, if you liked to give him to her."

"Miss Cockran?"

Miss Castle threw back her head and laughed at the open-eyed astonishment with which her suggestion was received.

"Oh, Sally, you girls are funny sometimes. Do you think mistresses are a race apart with no ordinary affections and weaknesses?"

The girl got very red.

"No, of course not—at least, I suppose not. You are quite different, at any rate. But Miss Cockran looks . . . oh, and Miss Cheeseman, you know . . . well, not silly, like us."

As she floundered, trying to find the words she wanted, Miss Castle, bending to kiss the puppy, who lay sprawled across her knee, examined her with twinkling eyes.

"I'm glad I'm silly," she said at last; and then as the girl began to expostulate indignantly that she hadn't meant that, of course, the other stopped her:

"I know what you mean, so don't apologise or explain—just remember it's not always safe to judge people by their appearances—Autolycus, for instance. . . ."

"Autol—what? Do you mean the puppy?"

"Yes—I have christened him that because he was picked up at a Fair, and there's no doubt he's a rascal—Shakespeare met, or invented, a gentleman of that name who was a pedlar, habitually attending Fairs. Anyhow, we'll call him 'Tolly' for short, except at School Commemoration."

"And Miss Cockran says he may stay here?"

"Yes—she is even prepared to adopt him, if you will pass on the ownership. You see, about a year ago she had a Yorkshire terrier, 'Gyp,' whom she loved very much, and

he was lost down a rabbit burrow. She says she never meant to have another dog, because she suffered so much when 'Gyp' disappeared; but 'Tolly' seems to have been sent to her, and he's very fond of her already."

"How splendid!"

"Yes—we are all fond of him. Even Miss Cheeseman will be converted to him in time, I hope, though she doesn't really care about animals."

"She wouldn't," muttered Sally, who disliked the thin, dark, rather precise little mistress, who was second in command at Seascape House, and took her Form in English Composition.

Miss Castle appeared not to hear this remark, unless the slight puckering of her brows showed she was displeased at it.

"I'm going to take Tolly away now," she said, "or he will begin to eat the cushions; but I will come back for some tea in about half-an-hour."

"Oh, thank you, Miss Castle—it's awfully decent of you."

They had a very jolly tea, and discussed everything except Seascape House: such topics as County Cricket, Napoleon's character, haunted houses, and even how to make stick-jaw toffee.

"I think I'll have a toffee party next term," said Miss Castle as she rose to go; "and you shall come and be kitchen-maid."

"May I be taster-in-chief as well, please?"

"Ah, I don't know about that. There will be so much competition for the office, I shall have to hold an examination, I expect, and charge an entrance fee."

She bent and kissed Sally as she spoke, and stood looking down at her for a minute, before she went.

"You will try to make friends here next term, won't you, child? It's the great thing that comes out of school life, I always think."

"But I have friends here," said the girl; "one at least and she is splendid."

After Miss Castle had gone she pulled out a pencil and block from under her pillow, and went on with the long letter she had been writing to Trina Morrison ever since her eye had been well enough to let her look continuously at the paper.

She intended to post this as soon as she had left Seascape House; not before—since she was afraid of drawing attention to any connection between herself and the elder girl which might involve the latter in her disgrace. To some nine or ten pages written earlier in the week she now added five or six more in praise of Miss Castle, and, more doubtfully, of Miss Cockran.

Peter had not admired Old Cocaine. She said she was stuffy and inhuman, like a mummy in the British Museum, that had dried up years ago, and ought to be kept on a shelf.

"But you see she is human, after all," wrote Sally, as she told about the Yorkshire terrier and the adoption of Autolycus.

In the end, the letter was so long that Sally had to ask Matron for a large envelope, pretending that she wanted it to hold part of a story that she was writing; and when she had got this, she addressed it to Trina at her uncle's house, with "Please Forward" in the corner.

It was very nearly holiday time now, and all who had had measles before, and seemed in no danger of getting it again, were sent home early, along with the convalescents.

Seascape House became quieter and quieter, save for the barking of Autolycus, who nearly wore himself out chasing sea-gulls, or hunting wildly for rabbits, amongst the furze bushes along the top of the cliff. He had to be washed twice a week by the indignant Jakes, who pretended that he would like to put a rope round his neck, attached to a big boulder, and sink him in the sea.

"He won't be allowed to do it, will he?" said Sally anxiously to Miss Cockran, when she went to say good-bye, just before starting for home.

"Certainly not! Autolycus is the school watch-dog. I

am going to trust him to see no one comes in or out after dark."

Was there a twinkle in the grey eyes? Sally was not sure, and felt uncomfortable under their scrutiny.

"Good-bye," she said gruffly. "And . . . and I'm sorry, you know, about it all——"

"That's all right. We start fresh next term, child—Don't think of what's behind you, but of what's in front. And for goodness' sake, don't go and play tennis on that foot of yours, or do anything foolish for the next six weeks."

She shook hands briskly, and Sally hobbled out to the taxi in which Matron was taking her to the station. Her first term at Seascape House was over.

CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH

WILL SHE COME?

"SALLY has improved in many ways—and I don't think, Cecilia, you are being quite fair to her when you complain she is so troublesome."

Mrs. Brendan spoke plaintively. Like many another mother, she wished her daughters agreed better, but did not know how to make them do so. During the term, Cecilia had been sweet-tempered and apparently happy; now, since Sally's return, she was continually ruffled and even snappy—so that the atmosphere of the house had become quite tense.

"There is nothing much to choose between Sally and the boys," went on their mother. "They all expect to do exactly what they like, in the holidays," and she sighed for the selfishness of youth.

"Oh, the boys!" broke in Cecilia impatiently; "that's quite different."

She did not explain, perhaps she did not realise, that the difference lay in her own attitude towards them. She had

long ago ceased to try to control her brothers, but Sally's case was another matter. Cecilia felt she should behave at home like a junior at school in the presence of a senior, and if Seascape House could not teach her this elementary piece of manners in the course of a term it had certainly failed in its task.

"I expect the school is not what it used to be when I was there," she continued, jumping from the subject of the boys to what was chiefly occupying her mind, and heedless of the fact that schools, like newspapers, never are what they used to be.

"Why, in my time, no kid of Sally's age would think of cheeking an elder girl, or of speaking to her in the way she does to me."

"You continually find fault with her, Cecilia."

"It would be continuous, if I were to point out even half her sins. That foot of hers, she was told to rest—what care does she take of it? Miss Cockran ordered her to avoid tennis, and all she says is, 'Well, I am doing that,' and then goes and rushes madly round at 'Bumble-Puppy' with Roger."

"She is very fond of Roger."

"She is even fonder of herself, little wretch! . . . I suppose she had a shocking report? We have never heard exactly what she did to twist her ankle; but it was over some piece of mischief."

"It was not a very good report, I fear, except for her work—but Miss Cockran says she has promised to do better next term, and that other mistress she likes—Miss Castle—writes that her behaviour was good in form."

Cecilia snorted. "It's my belief, from what she has let drop, that she was very nearly expelled."

At this moment Roger appeared with rather an anxious expression on his round and usually cheerful face.

"Sally has gone and jammed her foot again. She says it's nothing, but even leaning on my arm, I could hardly get her into the drawing room."

"I told you so," said Cecilia triumphantly, as Mrs. Brendan rose from her chair and hastened to the house.

"And you are jolly glad she has done it, aren't you?" said Roger, in an angry voice, as he turned to go. "You've changed into a nice sort of cad since you stuck your hair up, Cissy."

He flew off, leaving Cecilia with the tears smarting in her eyes—tears of self-pity at the way in which she was misunderstood.

"Mother has no idea how trying Sally can be," she told herself, and perhaps Mrs. Brendan had not. What she realised was that Sally had altered very considerably during the weeks she had been at school. She was distinctly less cocksure and talkative—restless, in a nervous, rather than an energetic sense—and with little of her old careless joy in the mere fact of being alive.

It was as if she were on the defensive the whole time against criticism she dreaded, whereas criticism before had made little or no lasting impression.

In those days, her frequent "I don't care!" had rung true, while now, it was obviously bravado.

"She is unhappy," said the mother to herself, but Sally was in no mood to make confidences. She felt it would be impossible to tell anyone, even Roger or Miss Castle, how Trina Morrison's silence had hurt her. Surely she could have sent a line—even a mere note—to say she was sorry about the sprained ankle, and that she was looking forward to next term?

"Rotten luck!" said Roger sympathetically, as he caught sight of his sister's expression. They were seated in the schoolroom, to whose couch Sally had been banished, to rest the ankle, swollen again after its new twist. For the moment, as their eyes met, she thought of confiding in him what was really paining her.

He knew a little about Peter's adventures, and had condescended to be quite thrilled over their daring; but when it came to the point, she could not bring herself to do

it. Roger could understand a damaged foot, but the idea of a broken heart, as Sally conceived her own to be at the moment, would seem to him mere "girl's gush."

"Yes—it is rotten," she said. "But, of course, I shouldn't have played 'Bumble-Puppy.' I never meant to —only Cecilia went on at me so about our hopping race on the lawn before breakfast, and then I felt I must do something worse."

Roger nodded.

"Cissy is a grandmother, but you do rag her rather a lot, you know. If I cheeked Bob like that he'd black my eye."

"Oh, shut up about Cissy, can't you?"

Sally was furious in a minute at the implied reproof, and Roger, with a noble effort at keeping the peace, walked to the window with his hands in his pockets and stared out in silence.

"What shall we do this afternoon, Sal?" he said, at last. "Look here, I'll go to the village and get some grub, and we'll have a brew of toffee on my Tommy cooker."

Sally shook her head.

"It's the Cartwrights' tennis party, and Cissy is driving the motor over."

"Well, Bob and Fraser can go—I don't want to, a bit. There'll probably be tons of grown-ups and nothing for us to do."

(Fraser was a school friend of the elder brother, stopping with the Brendans for part of his holidays.)

Sally's heart warmed to Roger in a sudden glow of affection. He had just bought a new tennis racquet, and she knew he was secretly longing to use it.

Hadn't Fraser, who was nearly seventeen, and quite "hot stuff" in the tennis line, said he had improved a lot lately?

"Nonsense!" she said sharply. "Of course you'll go. Why, I have all the new library books—and writing of my own to do too. I am always so thankful I can amuse myself."

"Honest Injun—do you mean it?"

Roger's expression was very doubtful. Condemned to half-an-hour of his own society, he would have welcomed a little conversation, even with the vicar, on cuneiform writing. On the other hand, he did want to play tennis at the Cartwrights' very badly. They had three courts, and, apart from the tennis, their teas were good, while the people they collected were usually an amusing crowd. It was bad luck for Sally not being able to go, of course, but if she didn't really mind being left, he would enjoy it.

His eyes told his sister what was passing in his thoughts, and she laughed as she said:

"No—I don't really mind a bit—in fact, your staying here would only make my foot feel worse; so don't be an ass, but go, and when you come back I'll want to know all about everybody."

"Rather—and I'll bring you an ice in my pocket."

He grinned cheerfully, and hurried off to change into his flannels.

Sally tried her best not to mind, as, her lunch over, she watched the motor disappear down the drive, with Roger waving his racquet in farewell from the dicky.

"After all, as Cecilia says, it's my own fault," she muttered with a grimace, and read novels until she fell asleep, to dream that she was riding Autolycus on a merry-go-round, with a clown pulling at her foot to make her pay sixpence.

"But he's my own dog," she expostulated, and found it was tea-time, and her mother was lighting up the kettle.

"So after I'd been to the bank," said Mrs. Brendan, who had evidently been talking for some minutes, "I called on those new people—the Meyers—and as they were out, and the vicarage was so close, I dropped in there for a little chat."

"If I gave you sixpence for every time you went to the village without dropping in at the vicarage, you wouldn't be very rich."

Mrs. Brendan laughed deprecatingly.

"I know you don't like Mrs. Musgrave, my dear, but her old age suits mine, and we have always plenty to talk about. Who do you think is arriving to-night to stop with her, by the way?"

"A black missionary," said Sally crossly.

"No," said Mrs. Brendan, "I don't think they have ever had a really black man—there was one from Borneo who was very dark. . . . I remember once, but——"

"Well, who was it, then—a yellow one?"

Sally knew she was being rude, but with an aching foot and head she felt thoroughly bored, and out of sorts.

"No, of course not, dear, but that young cousin of hers—the girl at Seascape House—Violet Tremson. I said I couldn't remember your mentioning her name very much in your letters."

Sally laughed rather bitterly, and pushed her cup across the table.

"Violet Goody-goody," she said. "No thanks, she's not in my line. Quite as dull as any missionary. She ought to suit the Musgraves."

"Sally!"

Mrs. Brendan's tone was so indignant that her daughter was driven to say "Sorry." Then, with a shrug, she returned to her novel-reading, and the silence was scarcely broken till the tennis party appeared.

Roger was in high spirits. His racquet had played splendidly, and he and a girl called "Bouncer,"—he thought her right name was Barbara Something-or-other—had got five games in a set against Fraser and Miss Cartwright.

Sally listened wearily for a quarter of an hour to a detailed account of each stroke, and then said she was going to bed.

"I'll give you an arm to your room," said Roger affably. And then, "Oh, snakes! I nearly forgot. That girl—what's her name,—you told me of, was there."

"What girl what's-her-name?"

"Peter—you know—Morrison, wasn't she? The Bouncer kid she came with called her Trina, and it wasn't till we were nearly going I twigged who she must be."

"What, Peter Morrison at the party? And you mean to say you didn't speak to her?"

Sally's eyes were shining now with mingled anguish and excitement.

"Keep your hair on—that's just what I did. It took some nerve too, for she was playing mostly with the grown-ups. Fraser had one set with her, and was fearfully 'smit'; but he said she wasn't much use at the game—more with her eyes, you know."

"Then he's an ass—for she's awfully good when she chooses."

"Perhaps she didn't choose. Anyhow, I'm only quoting what Fraser said; but the point is that I nerved myself up, walked over to her, and said—'I say—I think my sister's at school with you?' and she drawled, 'Was she?'"

"Yes—she would—she often drawls—she doesn't mean anything by it."

Roger laughed.

"You bet she does, sometimes. Awfully cheeky ass she made me feel—then I said, 'Her name's Sally Brendan, and she's got red hair.'"

"You didn't? How could you, Roger? And what did she say?"

"Goodness! do let me get it out. She laughed, then looked quite friendly, and said—'Had red hair, you mean, or has it grown again already?' Then we both laughed, and . . ."

"And didn't you ask her to come and see me, you cuckoo?"

"Course I did, though she's stopping with the Bouncer kid, whose people we don't know—they live right over t'other side of Clinton. Anyhow, I said you were laid up, or you would have been at the party, and that you'd like it no end, if she'd turn up."

"And what did she say?"

"Oh, usual stuff about being ever so sorry for you, and, of course, she'd come if she could; but she had only a couple of nights more before she went home, and the Bouncer lot were being hideously active about planning dances and things."

"And didn't you pin her down for any day or time?"

"How could I, kid?—I jolly well did my best, but the Bouncer youth—he's at Sandhurst—would keep telling her the car was ready, and glancing at me as if I were a grasshopper he'd like to stamp on. And Cecilia was shrieking at me across the drive, to buck me up—In the end, your Peter friend said, 'Your sister's calling you, isn't she?' so I had to toddle."

Sally clasped her hands together to hide that they were trembling.

"Of course she'll turn up some time," she said. "To-morrow I expect."

"Yes," said Roger, stoutly, "of course—bet your boots she will!" But his tone lacked any real conviction.

CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH

DISILLUSIONMENT

Sally waited indoors all the next day, her eyes almost glued to the schoolroom windows, from which she could watch the drive. Part of the time she pretended she was interested in the motor bike which Bob and Fraser had brought from the local shop, and were testing as a possible purchase. Roger and the mechanic stood on the grass at the edge of the gravel sweep, and gave their opinion at intervals; and when it seemed important enough, Roger would shout comments to his sister, using his hands as a megaphone.

"Some day we'll have one, Sally, and go touring," he

said enthusiastically, when he appeared at last, to get ready for lunch, his hands black with oil.

"That thing down there is no earthly—not properly geared, and only a two-stroke—but I have my eye on just the right sort of fellow—brand new too, and quite cheap—just look here." And he produced a well-thumbed paper out of his pocket.

Sally read the advertisement and studied the diagrams languidly. At the minute she had no wish to ride a motor cycle and admitted as much, when Roger at last took her to task for not listening to him.

"A Rolls Royce, or an ambulance car would be more in my line," she said gloomily, to which her brother responded:

"Rotten luck, old girl, I know, but cheer up."

"Why should I?" demanded his sister, sulkily; and Roger, looking awkward, scratched his head with an oily hand.

"Oh, I don't know, but grousing doesn't help things," he blurted out at last, to the rage of Sally, who had believed herself rather heroic in concealing her depression.

"Do get out, and leave me in peace," she said, and Roger went.

After tea they were reconciled, and played card games until Sally decided that she was tired, and would have her supper in bed, as she had done the night before. This time she said nothing about Trina Morrison, when she wished her brother good-night, and he stood fidgeting awkwardly in the doorway, before he at last volunteered:

"She—Peter, you know—said there were races to-day in the Clinton direction. I expect she would have to go to them. Staying with people like that she would have to do what they did, wouldn't she?"

"Yes," answered Sally, in a hard voice. And then again, as an evident bar to further conversation, "Good-night."

"Most likely she'll come to-morrow. Anyhow, so long, kid," and Roger vanished.

To-morrow came, and sped on its way, and there was no

sign of Trina Morrison. Sally's foot was better, but she looked so white and depressed that Mrs. Brendan became quite anxious.

"I know she has something on her mind. I do wish she would confide in me," she said to Cecilia, who sniffed rather indignantly.

"Well, Sally doesn't talk to me—only to Roger—and he is like a hedgehog these days—it's no use asking him anything. Anyhow, let us go for a family picnic this afternoon in the car, and insist on Sally coming. Bob and Fraser can carry her downstairs, though she could really manage quite well with her stick."

"I'll talk to her," said Mrs. Brendan, her face brightening; but Sally refused even to consider the idea.

"I'm much happier here. I won't be done good to by Cecilia—I do wish people would leave me alone."

"Much the best thing to do," growled Bob, who was not so sympathetic to Sally these holidays as usual. "If we took Miss Whine-and-Pine, she would probably turn the milk sour."

"Shut up," muttered Roger, and Mrs. Brendan told him not to be unkind; but the situation by this time was past mending. Sally, when pressed once more by her mother to go in order to please her, became not only angry, but defiant.

"I shan't stir from the house, and I wish you'd all clear out and leave me," she said. "It's simply sickening the way one can never get away from one's family."

"Sally!" Mrs. Brendan was really hurt, but could win no apology. Her daughter's shoulder remained turned to her, while there was sulky silence.

"Come away, Mother," said Bob. "There ought to be a limit to what even you'll stand from Sally," and he drew her out of the room after firing the parting shot at his sister, that "tons of people had their legs cut off in the War and never made the fuss she did over a twisted ankle."

"It isn't only her ankle, ass," said Roger—and would

have remained behind to give some comfort but for Sally's expression. There were times when she was best left alone, and this was evidently one of them.

Getting on his bicycle, he rode to the village, and in the sweet-shop where he was buying chocolate almonds, Sally's favourite delicacy at the minute, he encountered Mrs. Musgrave.

"They aren't all for me," he muttered, scenting criticism in her glance at the large bag. "They're for Sally—she's laid up, you know."

"H'm . . . invalid diet, I suppose?"

The twinkle in her eye contradicted her grim manner: for Mrs. Musgrave liked boys, and discovered a belated sense of humour when talking to them.

Roger got very red, as he answered gruffly, "It's nothing wrong with her inside—no disease, I mean. Just she has twisted her ankle again."

"Oh, poor Sally!" Mrs. Musgrave no longer bore her a grudge now that she had been sent to school on her advice: and then she called out, "Come here, Violet—this is Sally Brendan's brother Roger. I expect she has mentioned him to you."

"I don't think she has, but I'm glad to see him."

The introduction to Violet Tremson was made, and Roger, after the first blush, proffered his bag of almonds, and became quite confidential as they walked to the door munching. "Sally's off colour a lot, you know," he said unhappily. "I can't tell what's wrong—some school row—and she doesn't seem to have hit it off there—I mean—not to have many friends, exactly. . . ."

"No, not very many."

The tone was non-committal, but the smile that accompanied it friendly and encouraging.

Mrs. Musgrave was deep in conversation with a parishioner about a choral practice, and Roger, after a quick glance at her over his shoulder, went on:

"Sally's a decent kid. She talks an awful lot—but any

amount she doesn't mean—and underneath she's as sporting as anything."

"I know," said Violet Tremson.

Roger beamed. "I thought you would when I saw you. Perhaps you'll be looking in on her? We've got a family picnic this afternoon, and she can't come—at least, she doesn't want to. Her foot is giving her awful pain, and besides——"

He stopped, hesitating whether he should mention Trina Morrison, but decided not to do so. For one thing, he could only remember her as Peter, and felt it would be cheek for him to refer to anyone so grown up, by a nickname. Violet Tremson was also hesitating.

"You know, I don't think Sally would want to see me."

"Oh, what rot! It would cheer her up."

At this moment Mrs. Musgrave turned in their direction, and he said hastily, "Have another almond choc., do." As Violet Tremson helped herself, she murmured:

"Don't say anything to Sally about meeting me, will you?"

"Right oh!"

He looked rather surprised, and stared after her and Mrs. Musgrave as they went down the street. Girls were queer creatures and he didn't understand them—not even Sally. At any rate, he liked this one better than Peter-what-was-her-name, in spite of her fine clothes and scent, and if Peter didn't turn up—(he was ready to bet his boots she wouldn't)—this Violet might do instead.

After all, they both belonged to Seascape House, and could talk its "shop" to Sally—which was probably what she wanted.

His face grew smiling, as he pedalled slowly home on his bicycle, considering the matter, and priding himself on his tact.

Sally was astonished when the afternoon came, and he did not offer to stop with her. He was never very keen on family picnics, and she made certain that he would insist

on keeping her company, if merely to annoy Cecilia. On the whole, she was relieved when she heard he was going, and Mrs. Brendan as well.

"Thank Heaven, I shall have the house to myself," she said, loud enough for Bob to hear, to which he responded amiably:

"The absent household won't miss you, my good kid."

She did not sit up on her couch to watch the motor disappear down the drive, but settled herself amongst her cushions instead, to write a poem, which bore a strong resemblance to one of Henley's that she had just been reading, about "an unconquerable soul." It was not even a good imitation, she was honest enough to admit when she read it through at tea-time, and tearing it in half she lay face downwards on her cushions and surrendered to self-pity.

Miss Castle had said friendship was what really counted at school, and here was a friendship wrecked—the only thing which had mattered to her life.

"Miss Sally—there's a young lady wants to speak to you—shall I show her up?"

Sally sat up with a start, threw the rug off her couch and tried to smooth down her shaggy hair.

"A young lady? What's her name? Where is she?"

"In the drawing-room, miss—and she didn't say who she was—only that she thought you'd know."

"Of course! Of course!—give me my crutch, Amy."

Amy tried to expostulate. "I'm sure you oughtn't to go downstairs with that bad ankle. What the Mistress will say—— But," as she added afterwards to the kitchen, "I might just as well have spoken to a whirlwind for all the notice she took."

Her crutch under her arm, Sally cleared the space to the door in a few quick jumps, and was soon fumbling her way down the stairs. On the last step she slipped, and had to lean her weight for a moment on her bad foot. The pain made her wince and catch her breath, but a few

minutes later, as she entered the drawing-room, she was smiling.

"I knew you would come, Peter," she said, and then stopped dead, because it was not Peter, but Violet Tremson.

"You?" she said, her voice trembling.

"Yes, Sally—I saw your brother to-day, and he said you were laid up."

"He had no business to mention me to you. Why have you come? What do you want?"

Violet Tremson's quick colour came and went. "I haven't come to steal the silver," she said, laughing a little uneasily. Then abruptly, "Do sit down, Sally, you oughtn't to be standing—let me help you," and she went over.

"Don't touch me," said Sally fiercely. "I never asked you to come. Why do you pursue me in that horrible sort of way? Can't you take an answer when it's given you? I told you on the cricket pitch I never wanted to speak to you again."

Violet had gloves in her hand, and she measured them against the edge of her jumper before she spoke—very deliberately:

"I'm sorry. You were angry that day—and I knew Trina had put you against me—I hate keeping up a grudge, so I thought——"

"Even keeping up a grudge against Peter?" broke in Sally, with a sneer.

"Yes—even against Peter," said the other tranquilly, "I don't mind her now she's gone."

"Gone? What do you mean?"

Violet Tremson had been walking to the door: now she paused.

"Didn't you hear?" she said. "How odd—I—I thought you were together that night. She went to a dance, and stayed away, so she has been expelled."

For a minute she thought Sally was going to fall, but as she took a step towards her, the younger girl pulled herself together and caught at a bookcase for support.

"And you—you goody-goody, I suppose you went to Miss Cockran and told her what a lot of harm Peter was doing directly the row came out—like the sneak you are?"

"Sally, be careful what you're saying."

"Well, did you go to Miss Cockran after the row?"

"Yes—but only——"

"Shut up! That's enough—and get out. I don't want to hear any more. You are the most unspeakable cad, and if you have got any pride, you will leave me alone after this."

Violet Tremson was nearly as white as Sally, and, for a second, her usually smiling mouth was twisted with a very ugly expression.

"I think I have enough pride for that," she said quietly, and stooped to pick up one of the gloves she had dropped. Then she walked out of the room with her back held very straight, and Sally heard the front door close with a jerk behind her.

"I hate her! I hate her! How dared she come!" she said to herself, crouching down in one of the armchairs, but in her heart she was not sure if she did not hate Peter most.

So that explained things—Peter was expelled. She knew she would not see Sally at Seascape House any more, and therefore she had not bothered—even to write a postcard. She had just put their whole friendship out of her life as something that no longer counted. It had been the easiest thing to do, and Peter's comfort had, as always, dictated the line of least resistance.

"Confoundedly selfish," that was what her Uncle Tom had called her, and it was true after all.

"I won't think of her again—ever," said Sally passionately, and picking up her crutch, forced herself to go upstairs. She was very tired, and her foot was aching by the time she reached the schoolroom, but she went over to her desk and picked out the few mementoes she possessed of her friendship—a school snap-shot she had stolen from Mabel Gosson, a scrawled note, a caricature done of herself by Trina, in a schoolbook.

In the grate, she burnt them all, angry tears rolling down her cheeks.

When the picnic party returned, Sally was already in bed with her blinds drawn, and refused either to talk or to eat her supper.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH

THE NEW TERM

SALLY spent a couple of weeks in bed after her interview with Violet Tremson, the renewed swelling of her ankle after her journey downstairs being aggravated by a fever, for which the doctor could not account. As soon as she was better, she was sent off, at his suggestion, to stay with her Uncle Frank and Aunt Antoinette in Brittany for a complete change of air and scene.

"But I don't want to go, so what's the use of sending me? I just want to be left alone," Sally had protested sullenly; but somehow, when she saw her uncle's smiling face at Cherbourg and realised that he knew nothing of the cause of her unhappiness, she began to forget it too, and felt comforted.

"Been overworking, have you, Miss Pale-face? So they have cut off your curls to give your brain air—was that it?" he demanded cheerily: and Aunt Antoinette, who had first of all cast glances of horror at her niece's shaggy head, became sympathetic, and offered to see what her maid and the local hairdresser could do towards improving matters.

They did a good deal, and by the time Sally arrived home just on the eve of her second school term, she no longer looked the shorn little ragamuffin of Parchester Fair. She had grown also, and though very thin, had lost something of the irresponsible elfin wildness of which Mrs. Musgrave had so strongly disapproved.

"You will be happier this term, won't you, darling?"

asked her mother, a little anxiously, as they stood looking down on the already packed trunk on the last night of the holidays.

"Oh, yes!" said Sally, "I expect so."

Her tone was careless, but she did not meet Mrs. Brendan's eyes, until, hearing a sigh, she looked up suddenly, put her arms round her mother, and hugged her.

"I'm going to make this term a success," she said, almost fiercely. "Don't say anything to Cissy, but just remember that I mean to—whatever happens. I was nearly expelled last term, but this time I shan't run any risks. It's not good enough."

She laughed bitterly, and Mrs. Brendan kissed her. "My poor Sally," she said, "you take things so hardly."

Sally shrugged. "I did—but I shan't in future—I'll just go on in my own way. You know the Miller—'For I care for nobody—no not I—and nobody cares for me.'"

Again she laughed, and Mrs. Brendan looked a little more distressed.

"My dear, but one can't live to oneself only in this world," she began, when Sally cut her short:

"I can," she said impatiently, "and I mean to do it. As long as my work is up to the mark, and I keep the rules, as I intend, there's nothing you need worry about, is there? I won't disgrace you—or even Cecilia."

Once more she was Sally Cocksure—cool and defiant. But Mrs. Brendan, as she kissed her in silence, felt there was a subtle difference between her old attitude and her new. Before, she had been sure of the citadel of her own independence; now, she had learned that she would have to fight for its defence.

Lying in the dark, with her hands behind her head, Sally sang softly to herself that night, the lines she had taken as her motto:

> "I am the master of my fate,
> I am the captain of my soul."

Thinking of it made her eyes shine and her heart beat

fast. It was splendid. It meant getting things done as one wanted, as Napoleon did, without being worried by qualms about other people's opinions. Napoleon was Sally's hero at this time, in contrast to Charles the Martyr, who, during the last term, had been the idol of her Form. She remembered with satisfaction how she had outraged public opinion by referring to him in an essay as "the man of straw."

"Strength is the only thing that really counts, she told herself, and the phrase pleased her so much that she repeated it next morning while dressing, and came down to breakfast whistling cheerfully. Fortified by her own courage, she said good-bye with great calmness to her mother at Clinton Station. She had utterly refused to allow Cecilia to go with her, and now she begged Mrs. Brendan to leave her as soon as she had taken her ticket and seen that her box was properly labelled.

"I loathe hanging about for last words, Mummy," she said. "You'll probably want to cry, and that will make me feel softy too—so do let us get it over here. There are crowds of Seascapers on the platform, so I shan't be stranded by myself, or anything."

"I thought I saw that girl—Mrs. Musgrave's niece, you know—I liked her when I met her that time you were in bed ill," and Mrs. Brendan looked round hopefully, but rather vaguely. She did not care for the idea of Sally travelling by herself.

"I daresay you did see her, and perhaps I shall run into her, but I'm not going to be left in her charge, or anyone's —so there!" Sally bumped her suit-case impatiently against a seat, but at that minute she saw Miss Castle in the distance, and hastily leaving her mother, made off.

"One of the mistresses—I'll be all right—so long!" she called out, and disappeared.

The porter, standing close by with her box, grinned.

"Don't you worry, ma'am, she'll be all right—I'll see she don't miss the train."

Mrs. Brendan, presenting him with a shilling, turned back slowly into the town; she remembered that she had some shopping to do for Cecilia. As she went, she sighed.

Sally, in the meantime, had indeed run very hard into Violet Tremson, with her suit-case, because she was wondering where Miss Castle had gone, and looking over her shoulder to try to find her.

"Sorry," she said with a scowl, and encountered a cold stare that was so unlike her remembrance of Violet's tranquil friendliness that it made her feel uncomfortable. She could never recall exactly what she had said that evening in the drawing-room, for all she had thought about was her longing to find Peter; and then, when she was disappointed, a desire almost as strong had taken possession of her to hurt the immediate cause of her disappointment and make her suffer a little of her own pain.

"I don't care if I was beastly—do her good—interfering missionary!" she muttered, mindful of Trina's sneers, and came upon Miss Castle as she was seeing a couple of new girls into one of the carriages.

"Keep a corner seat there for me with a book," Sally heard her say, and running up to her, asked:

"Please, Miss Castle, may I get in with you too?"

"Why, Sally,—of course you can—climb in—how's the foot?"

"Better—but I mayn't play hockey this term. Isn't it a shame?"

She got in happily, and as she stood in the doorway, saw two scowling faces watching her. One belonged to Olive Parker, her old enemy of the Shrimps, and the other to a friend, Susy Cranstone, of the Upper Fourth, who had been one of the group that had ducked her in the sea. Susy, for the time being at any rate, "adored Miss Castle"—as she announced on every possible occasion. She had obviously wished to travel in the same carriage as her idol, but had not dared to ask the adored one's leave; and now there was no room for her, as besides Sally and the new

girls, there were several quite small juniors giggling together at the far end.

"Silly ass!—why didn't she bag the seat, if she wanted it so much?" said Sally to herself, with great contempt, in her best Napoleonic manner—and settled herself ostentatiously opposite Miss Castle, by shifting a new girl—then fell to reading her magazines till the train started.

To her annoyance, when she arrived at Seascape House and went to take up her old quarters in room No. 9, she found she had been moved. Her cubicle was now in a bigger dormitory, A, on the top floor, at the end of a passage—and her next-door neighbour was no other than Susy Cranstone. Beyond Susy was Frisky Harrison, quite recovered from her last term's measles, and ready to live up to her nickname, to judge by the noise going on behind her curtains—where she was supposed to be unpacking.

"Can't you kids be quiet?" said a voice suddenly, and Poppy Bristow flounced into the room.

"What are you doing—standing about there?" she demanded of Sally, who answered coolly:

"Looking at you. I've only just turned up, and I'm not making a row."

This remark led to further noise and giggles behind the curtains, and Frisky Harrison pushed her head out between them.

"Ah, Poppy, darlint, have pity on me. Sure, isn't it the first day of term?"

(Frisky was not Irish, but she cultivated a brogue for humorous purposes.)

Poppy scowled. She did not seem to have come back in a good temper, and was certainly not amused on this occasion.

"Be quiet," she said. "I want everyone who sleeps in this room to come out here a minute."

There was something so truculent in her manner that complete silence fell, and in a minute Frisky Harrison and Susy Cranstone were standing beside Sally. They were

joined by Violet Tremson, from the fourth cubicle in the corner.

"What is it?" said Violet.

Poppy's face cleared slightly. "Oh, I didn't know you were going to be here, Violet—it's these three kids I meant. Now listen, you three. I have got a 'single' at the end of the passage, and Miss Cockran has put me in charge of this room. She says she won't have any of the insub-sub-subordination there was last term, and if I have any trouble I am to report it at once—and I j-jolly well mean to—see?"

As she grew excited she began to stammer, but no one laughed—there was too much grim earnestness in her tone. "All right, Poppy—I didn't mean anything," muttered Frisky at last, in a weak voice; and she and Susy went back soberly behind their curtains. Violet Tremson had already disappeared. Sally was turning into her cubicle with a shrug when Poppy caught her by the shoulder.

"See here, kid—your precious friend has left, and I'll stand no cheek. You've not got a good name at headquarters, so you'd better be careful."

Sally met her glance without flinching. It was with a great effort of will that she prevented herself from smiling contemptuously as she would have liked to do.

"I haven't cheeked you yet, have I?" she asked quietly, and it was Poppy's eyes that fell before hers, as the prefect turned away.

"All the same, it will be difficult not to get into a row with her as monitress," Sally told herself, as she reflected complacently on the triumph of will that had kept her from giving Poppy a handle to abuse her.

How difficult it was going to be she had not yet realised.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH

THE BLOTTED ESSAY

Half the autumn term had gone, and Sally, though she did not mention it in her letters home, found that she disliked her life at Seascape House a great deal more than even when she had been a new girl. It was true that she had achieved her move into the Lower Fifth, where she sat, like an infant prodigy, among her elders; but the change was not to the throne of triumph which she had pictured in imagination.

Violet Tremson was head of the form, and kept her place by a narrow margin, above her friend, Doreen Priestly. It was only on occasions that Sally came third, more often she was fifth or sixth; and though at her age she should have been contented with this position, it did not satisfy her ambition to take the lead and dominate those around her.

What worried her most was that she could not understand her failure to achieve anything for which she worked. To her mother, she wrote that her new Form-mistress, "Old Cheeserings," disliked her; and though this was probably true—for Sally's manners were not endearing towards those whom she herself disliked—she knew in her heart that mutual lack of affection would make no difference in her marks.

The only other explanation was that Sally was still too young to achieve, with her usual ease and quickness of grasp, the standard of work in the Lower Fifth, and this she was not prepared to admit.

"Of course, it is difficult to play a lone hand," she wrote Roger, in a moment of expansion, when she longed for sympathy—even in her brother's almost illegible scrawl—and she added, "Still, you bet I hold some trumps, and will make the most tricks in the end."

She also put "Napoleon did," but crossed this out, for Napoleon had been beaten at Waterloo. He had trusted

his friends—people like Bernadotte—and they had betrayed him.

Sally never meant to trust anyone at school again; but though she made no effort to win friends, she would have been glad of a group of admirers—however humble.

In the end, one admirer presented herself—a putty-faced girl, called Catherine Dowl, who had been in the Lower Fifth for years, and was almost as much disliked there as Sally herself—though no one quite knew why.

She had very curly hair, and queer, slanting eyes, that seemed to disappear when she talked, beneath her lazy eyelids; and when she laughed it was noiselessly, so that the only sign was the show of teeth and upper gums.

"The Cat," she was nicknamed, or "Puss Puss," but it was not an attractive member of that much-maligned race that she resembled. There was no Persian pride, or grace, in her, but rather the self-defensive cunning of a persecuted slum tabby.

Frisky Harrison, who had also been moved into the Lower Fifth at the same time as Sally, declared that "Puss Puss" cheated in arithmetic, at which she was very bad, and other members of the Form ostentatiously drew their books away, when she sat near them. She did not seem to resent this, nor was she put off at first when Sally refused to have anything to say to her.

"Your essay was much better than Violet's this week—Miss Cheeseman favours her," she said one day, in the middle of the morning interval. To which Sally, who had been thinking so herself only a minute before, responded:

"Rot!"

She knew suddenly, that it wasn't true.

"You ought to be head of the Form, for you are much more original," went on the girl, in her soft voice. "That's why they don't like you."

"I shall be head very soon," said Sally, flattered, in spite of herself, by a tribute to her powers that quite met her own views on the subject.

"I know—you are the horse for my money, and I have put all I possess on your winning—so mind you do."

The girl laughed noiselessly, and as she spoke seated herself quite close to Sally.

"Tell me what you think of Wordsworth," she said confidentially. "I was watching you yesterday and could see that you didn't agree with Cheeserings."

"It's no use disagreeing with her, is it?"

"No, I should think not—sheer waste of time."

The "Cat" bared her teeth and threw back her head, as though her companion had said something extraordinarily funny.

"But you didn't change your opinion, did you? I expect it is very rarely you change when you have made up your mind."

"Hardly ever," said Sally carelessly, and forgot that she was changing it at the minute. She no longer definitely disliked Catherine Dowl. That day she talked to her in class, between the lessons, and walked up and down the passages with her, indifferent to the contemptuous curiosity of the Juniors.

"They haven't any brains, of course," said the "Cat" tranquilly, when Olive Parker miawed and crowed at them from behind a pillar, and the other shrugged and agreed.

"I don't care a hang, if it amuses their small minds," she said.

"You wouldn't. Have you ever noticed how often really great people have been disliked at school?"

Sally had not, and was glad to have it pointed out. She would remember Shelley.

In the meantime, she was quite prepared to neglect the names of all those who had been both popular and illustrious.

"Anyhow, it doesn't matter, does it?" she said grandly, "I mean being unpopular. Success so often is envied just because it is the thing that counts most."

The next week Violet Tremson was only third, and Sally second, in Form marks. Violet remembered giving in her

arithmetic paper, but it had not reached Miss Skalding, the mathematical mistress, while her essay was so covered in blots as to be perfectly unintelligible.

"I can't understand it," said Miss Cheeseman. "It is not like you to be so untidy."

"I . . . I didn't make those blots," said Violet slowly. Her eyes were astonished. "I . . . I'm sure I didn't," she added.

"Who else could have made them without your seeing them?" asked Miss Cheeseman in an annoyed tone. She had an unfortunately querulous manner; and everyone looked round at everyone else, except Violet, who was turning the pages of her essay with rather a high colour in her cheeks.

Sally wondered if it could be Frisky Harrison; she was often careless with ink, and had a leaky fountain pen which her neighbours dreaded; but her expression was one of obvious innocence. Then the girl looked beyond her, and caught for a moment a rather peculiar gleam in Catherine Dowl's slanting eyes. It was triumph—there was no doubt of it.

So the Cat had done it—Sally knew in a flash—and also that it had not been done for love of her, but in hatred of Violet Tremson.

Putting her evidence rapidly together she could find none direct, but everything pointed to this decision. Peter had once told her, as an illustration of Violet's missionary spirit, that Violet had caught "Puss Puss" cheating and had forgiven her, on promise of amendment.

"Much use to forgive a slimy beast like that," Peter had said. "She should have reported her to a prefect, and got her expelled. She is such a second-rate cad."

In her revulsion of feeling against Trina Morrison, Sally had pushed this judgment into the back of her mind, when accepting the Cat's homage.

"Cheating is silly," she had told herself, and argued that it was therefore impossible; but now, remembering the

cunning in Catherine Dowl's eyes, she realised that it was not impossible. What was unlikely, was that the Cat would ever forgive those who found her out.

With a feeling of rising discomfort, she stood in front of the notice-board on Monday morning, and saw her name second, with Violet Tremson's third.

"Congratulations," whispered Catherine Dowl, appearing as usual at her elbow. "Now there is only one more rung for you to climb in this Form."

"Shut up," said Sally fiercely, forgetting wisdom in her indignation. "Violet ought to be first or second, and you know that quite well."

"Ought she?" The Cat raised her eyebrows. "I didn't know. Well, she isn't there, is she?" And she laughed noiselessly.

"I wish she was," said Sally. "I loathe winning anything by underhand means."

"Ah!" said the Cat quickly, and she suddenly raised her usually soft voice.

"Then did you make the blots on the essay?"

"No, I didn't—but you know who did, quite well."

"On the contrary—I quite believed it was Violet who must have done it, as Miss Cheeseman said, until you accused yourself."

Sally glared; but the Cat's slanting eyes merely blinked, without any expression at all in them, as they met hers.

By this time a large part of the Form had gathered round and were sniggering happily at the quarrel.

"Quite amusing when thieves fall out," said Doreen Priestly. "Do come here, Violet. I have never heard anything like it before. The Cocky-doodle says she threw ink on your essay to get above you on the Form List."

"I didn't," said Sally furiously, "I said I hated being above her, just because someone had played a dirty trick."

"Well, who was the someone if it wasn't you?"

Sally looked round the ring of hostile faces; she saw that

the Cat had slipped away, and was already seated at her desk, with her head bent over a book.

"I didn't do it," she said sullenly.

"Then who did?" demanded Doreen. "You know something about it—you and your precious friend—or why did you bring up the subject at all?"

The hostile glances shifted for a moment to Catherine Dowl, who looked up tranquilly and then laughed.

"Does Sally accuse me?" she asked. "Then I suppose she has a proof—or else she is in one of her tempers. I am too old to do anything so childishly spiteful—besides, why should I? I'm sure I don't care who is head of the Form, for I know it will never be me."

At this there was a slight titter. Catherine, however much she may have cheated, remained steadily at the bottom of the Lower Fifth. The hostile glances left her, and focused themselves once more on Sally.

"Why don't you own up, kid?" said Doreen contemptuously.

"Because I didn't do it, you fool."

Sally's face was white with passion, and her anger seemed to communicate itself to the rest of the Form. There were shouts of—"You did," "You must have," "Sneak!" "Own up!" when suddenly Violet Tremson, who had been seated unconcernedly at her desk, leaped to her feet and pushing her way through the group called out sharply:

"Shut up, everyone, and listen—it's my essay you are talking about, isn't it? Well, I spilt the ink myself."

There was prolonged silence, till Frisky Harrison said, in an injured voice:

"You told Cheeserings you didn't."

"It's possible to make mistakes, isn't it—even over an essay?"

At this rejoinder there was a roar of laughter—Frisky's mistakes were many, especially in English composition—and most of the girls returned to their desks satisfied, or

at least indifferent; but Doreen Priestly remained by the notice-board, looking doubtfully from Violet to Sally.

"A funny sort of mistake, isn't it?" she said quietly. "I believe you are shielding the kid, after all."

"I didn't do it, I tell you," said Sally fiercely. "You may think me a cad, but I'm not that sort."

"Sally didn't do it—I'm not shielding her," said Violet. "Do drop the whole thing—can't you? It's my essay."

Miss Cheeseman came in at this minute, and the subject was dropped; but the scene that had just taken place had two results. First, that to Sally's burden of unpopularity was added a vague accusation of underhand dealing, and, secondly, that an end came to all friendship between herself and the Cat.

This was not Catherine Dowl's fault, as she was careful to point out that afternoon, when she tracked down Sally at last in a deserted corner of the playing fields.

"So it was Violet Tremson's own sin that found her out," she began gaily, as though there had been no words between them.

Sally clenched her hands. "Shut up—and leave me alone, can't you?"

"But why?—I'm sorry if I annoyed you this morning—but really, I have more cause to be annoyed with you, only I know you lost your temper."

"Shut up," said Sally again; and then, as the other raised her eyebrows, "Oh, you know quite well that I don't want ever to see you any more—do go."

"Why, may I ask?"

The Cat's eyes were more slanting than usual, and there was a gleam in their corners that reminded Sally of a vicious ferret, belonging to her brother Bob.

"Because . . . because I may be unpopular, and hard up for friends, but I'm not in such want as to be forced to be friends with you."

"Oh—so that's it, is it?"

Catherine Dowl's lip was drawn up till her gum was partly bare.

"You precious little fool," she said, and her smile became a snarl. "You mean you accuse me of blotting that essay and destroying the arithmetic paper?"

"I know you did," said Sally. "I saw the way you looked in class and every minute I've thought it over since I've become more and more certain. Trina Morrison told me you cheated, and Frisky says you do, and I believe them both now, though I wouldn't before when I was trying to like you."

"Perhaps you'd care to report me for cheating then, and bring your proofs with you to the prefects' meeting—they are holding one this afternoon, in the Sixth."

The smooth voice had a snaky ring, and for the minute Sally was frightened. She had spoken impetuously, from the heat of her indignation, and had not thought of proofs—where were they? Just the gleam in the Cat's eyes, as Miss Cheeseman had spoken. It was a very vicious gleam now, and the snarl had changed back into a smile of triumph and malice.

"You'll do it . . . of course . . . and bring the proofs, eh?"

Sally suddenly forgot her fear. "Very well," she said contemptuously. "Come! I will go to the prefects, and ask them if we can have a trial by ordeal—like in history. I'll say you are a cheat before the whole school, and put my hand in the fire without shrieking to prove it. Will that satisfy you?"

Catherine Dowl's jaw had dropped. "What do you mean? . . . I don't understand . . . it's childish and silly—what you suggest."

"I prophesy you won't find it silly," said Sally grimly. "Just tell me this—If I accuse you of cheating before the whole school, and you deny it, and I put my hand in the fire, to show I believe what I say—do you think they'll believe you or me?"

The Cat was silent. There was no doubt, with her

reputation, which the school would believe. When she spoke again, her voice had its usual flat note of indifference and the snarling smile had disappeared.

"I suppose you are joking—of course, you must be—and so was I. It would be stupid to drag in prefects about our private rows, and I am sure, if you don't want to be friends, I don't. I thought you looked lonely before—that was why I tried to chum up."

"Well, I like being lonely, thanks—so . . . good afternoon."

Sally turned on her heel. "Ugh!" she said to herself, and again—"Ugh!" as she thought over her short friendship with the Cat, and ended with a fervent, "Thank Heaven, I never let her kiss me."

CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH

MISCHIEF

Sally had now no friends, and had lost her only admirer. She found her work in Form a struggle, and life in the dormitory a severe test of her self-control, for it seemed that Poppy Bristow was ever on the watch to catch her out in some misdeed and punish her.

One night the trouble arose because of beetles in her slippers. Anyone might have been forgiven for shrieking aloud at the discovery made with bare feet; but Sally got 300 lines, as well as having to endure a mocking chant from the next cubicle, as soon as the prefect's back was turned:

"Sally Cock-sure,
Sally Cock-roach,"

and then a faint crow.

There was no doubt who was the real culprit.

A few evenings later Poppy burst into the dormitory, purple with fury.

"My bed!" she said. "An apple-pie! . . . Which of you has dared?"

There was a faint giggle from the irresponsible Frisky, and then complete silence.

"Which of you?" demanded Poppy again: and then, "Violet, I know it wasn't you?"

"No."

"Susy?"

"No, of course not."

They each answered "No" in turn, and Frisky whispered, "Perhaps you'll have to go round the school to find out," when the prefect said, in a nasty voice:

"Oh, no, I shan't, for the someone who is afraid to own up has left her gym. belt on my floor, and it has got a tape name. Sally Brendan, is this belt yours?"

"Yes—if it has my name on it."

"How d-dared you come into my room?"

"I didn't."

"You little l-liar!—Why, I have the proof here—complete evidence. You must have done it."

A storm of abuse followed, endured in silence, while Sally considered who the real offender could be, and at last wearily gave up the matter. Perhaps Olive Parker, at the instigation of Susy Cranstone, or it might be the Cat's way of getting even with her—one of her many enemies, at any rate.

"I didn't do it," she repeated, when she could get in a word. "But if you like to think I did—well, I can't help it."

"I know you did it, little brute! Why, I have the proof in my hands—this belt with your name on it. You can just go straight to bed, after supper, for the next fortnight."

This was not a punishment that Sally minded. With any luck, she could read in bed, and at any rate she would escape the loneliness of the evening play hour that she had grown to dread.

"All right," she said, and for the next eight days went upstairs quietly, straight from the dining-room, being apparently asleep when the rest of the dormitory appeared at their usual hour.

One night, however, the spirit of mischief entered into her.

As she came in at the door, she saw, on a chair beside it, Poppy's hockey stick, sweater and cap, as she had carelessly flung them down and forgotten them, in the course of a dispute with Frisky Harrison on the state of her cubicle. Sally was by no means the only person to get into trouble with the prefect.

No one was about: not even Matron, or one of the maids, as Sally tip-toed over, and peered into Frisky's cubicle. It was extraordinarily tidy for once, but when Sally had finished working her will in it, very little of this was left. The bed-clothes, for instance, were in the chest of drawers, whose proper contents lay in little heaps on the floor: the shoes stood in a row on the pillow: the washing-stand was upside down on the bed, and on it Sally piled the hockey stick, jumper, and cap that she had found by the door.

With a subdued giggle of joy at her handiwork she retired into her own cubicle and hurried into bed. Frisky was late coming up: she often barely avoided detection and this night slid into the dormitory like a shadow. The next instant came her shout of surprise and indignation.

"I say, who has done this? Sally Brendan, is it you?"

"Done what? Do go to bed, Frisky, and be quiet." This from Violet Tremson, in a sleepy voice.

"But I can't, you ass. There's every sort of thing on my bed, including my washstand."

"What?"

Susy was soon peering over her partition, and Violet standing in the doorway, staring. They talked so much and so loud that they were speedily joined by Poppy; and last of all came Sally, already repentant of her rashness,

but determined to see the thing she had engineered through to its end, even if it meant expulsion.

"You little beast!—you were up here early, so, of course, it's your handiwork," said Poppy, turning and gripping her by the wrist.

"Why me? I've been asleep," said Sally, yawning. "Do let me go back to bed. I thought it was something interesting."

"Very interesting—for me," retorted the indignant Frisky. "When I've got to clear up the mess. It's like your cheek."

"Sally shall clear it, of course," said Poppy. "And tomorrow I report her to Miss Cockran."

"But what proof have you got that Sally did it?" said Violet Tremson, in a cool judicial voice.

"Well, she was up here early, wasn't she? She must have done it."

"Anyhow those aren't my things left behind in the cubicle, and I don't think they are Frisky's," said Sally, pointing to the cap, jumper, and hockey-stick, that lay on the upturned washstand. It was the opportunity for which she had been waiting, and the note of injury in her voice was full of meaning.

"No, of course they aren't mine," said Frisky, examining them. "They are sizes too big. Why, Poppy, they are yours—however did they get here?"

There were a few seconds' silence before the joke that had been played dawned. Then Violet Tremson's mouth began to twitch.

"I'm afraid," she said, "they walked in here of themselves, like Sally's belt into Poppy's room, the other night, or else——"

She stopped suggestively, and Susy, from her seat on the wooden partition, gave a convulsive cackle of joy.

"Or else what? Say what you mean—do," demanded Poppy, whose brain was working, as usual, at a snail's pace; she was obviously uneasy.

"I mean that in another case (of course, you didn't do it, Poppy, we all know that) the clothes would be proof—evidence that whoever they belonged to must have done it."

"Like the belt, the other night," murmured Frisky, her eyes on the floor, to hide their laughter; but Poppy could read it in her attitude, as in Violet Tremson's voice, and Susy's sudden noisy scramble down behind her partition. She had been badly scored, and they were glad, because, though Sally was unpopular, the average schoolgirl likes fair play, and they knew that of late she had not had it.

The prefect's face went a dull purple as she glared from one to the other (Sally had wisely slipped back into her cubicle), then she picked up her things, and said in a strained voice:

"If there's another hoax of this kind, I'll report the whole d-dormitory."

The door slammed behind her, and no one said a word, though Violet and Susy assisted Frisky to put her things straight. That night Sally was happy until she fell asleep, and so, apparently, were the other inmates of her dormitory, for every now and then she could hear them stifle their merriment in their pillows.

The next day she could feel a change in the atmosphere of her Form.

"Ripping score, that of yours last night!"

Sally was so surprised at being addressed in a pleasant tone by anyone, that she looked up speechless at Frisky Harrison, who stood by her desk, grinning. Frisky went on confidentially:

"Bet you that we won't have any more trouble with the 'Poppet' down our way, this term."

"No," said Sally cautiously. The instinct to boast, "Oh, just a little brain-wave on my part," had died away, almost as it was born, and she did not yet know what kind of amiable remark to make instead.

Rather awkwardly, she picked up a book from the floor,

and her companion left her; but the incident was significant of the new attitude of her classmates. Friendly they could hardly be called, but she no longer felt a pariah like the Cat, and found herself lending and borrowing books, pencils and indiarubber without any of the cold-shouldering to which she had grown accustomed.

Violet Tremson alone continued to ignore her presence, never addressing her except when compelled, and then with eyes that looked beyond her, as though she were non-existent. Last term Sally would not have minded; now, she wished she had not been so rude and contemptuous in thrusting aside the other's advances.

True, Violet had not the same exciting personality as her once beloved Peter, but, on the other hand, living in Form with her, the younger girl realised that she was neither "dull as ditch water," nor "goody-goody." It may have been that with Trina's influence removed she was able to enter more into the kingdom of good-natured chaff and schoolgirl politics; but at any rate, there was no doubt that Violet had grown immensely in popularity.

This was partly due to her success in games during the autumn term.

Her cricket had been a very medium performance, but swift running and steady nerves put her amongst the best of the hockey players, and from the second eleven she was very quickly promoted to be a forward in the first.

By this time the school as a whole, and not merely her own Form, had begun to take an interest in Violet Tremson. The Upper Fifth and Sixth showed a readiness to draw her into their select circles and ask her opinion, while school weathercocks, such as Mabel Gosson, hastened to worship the rising sun.

It was no surprise to anyone then, save perhaps to Violet herself, when her name appeared on the list of prefects posted up on the school notice-board towards the end of the term.

"That means we are done with 'the Poppet' for good in

Dormitory A," said Frisky. "Oh, Violet, I am glad!" Susy clapped her hands, and declared Old Cocaine had more sense than she had given her credit for. Sally alone said nothing aloud. She was not going to "toady to the great," she told herself, in scorn of Mabel Gosson and her kind, but she was secretly thankful for the change.

It would be easy, she guessed, to live with Violet Tremson, who, whatever her private likes and dislikes, was even-tempered and scrupulously fair.

By this time Sally was looking forward eagerly to the holidays, when Uncle Frank had declared he and Aunt Antoinette might be in London and give her a week of theatres and other festivities. The hockey fever that reigned at Seascape House did not touch her, for the doctor still forbade her to play, and she did not care enough for anyone—not even for her Form—to be thrilled over the results of various matches. Her chief pleasure was taking Autolycus for walks, since Miss Cockran, in consideration of her not being able to share in games, and on a solemn promise that she would conduct herself so as not to disgrace the school, allowed her to go out alone with the dog, mainly on one of the back roads leading to a certain Tadiscombe Farm.

"It would be better if there were someone with you," she had said, but did not press the point when Sally, terrified that Catherine Dowl's name might be mentioned as a possible companion, since she also was not strong enough for games, hastily declared everyone was busy, she knew.

"I can trust you to be sensible, can I? And not get up to mischief?" said Miss Cockran, frowning slightly. "It's a very great concession from ordinary rules that you are asking me to make."

"I promise I'll be as good as if you or Miss Castle were with me, and I would just love it, please, if I may? I used to roam the country at home."

"Yes," said the Headmistress, rather grimly. "So I

have been told. It is just that kind of roaming—playing practical jokes and breaking through hedges, trampling down corn, etc., that would bring disgrace on the school."

Sally flushed. "Well, I won't do anything of that kind —indeed I won't—I'll just mind Tolly."

Miss Cockran smiled, and her face cleared. "Very well," she said. "And if you try to teach him to 'mind' you, I believe you will have your work cut out. He pays no attention to anyone when he's after rabbits."

"He's a great sportsman," said the girl proudly; "I only wish I had my brother's ferrets here."

"I'm very glad you haven't, or the pair of you would be shortly on trial for poaching. Don't let him chase rabbits more than you can help. Remember, I have lost one dog that way, and this cliff here is a labyrinth of holes."

"Very well, Miss Cockran, and thank you so much."

Sally went off cheerfully, whistling to Tolly, whom she found in the garden. Once the school gates were passed, she was her old self, confident and care-free—and yet, at heart, she knew that she did not hate Seascape House as she pretended.

"If only it was just a little different," she told herself, and added with the natural candour and insight which had prevented her from becoming a hopeless prig, "I expect Roger would say it's I who ought to be different."

CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH

GAMES AND TOFFEE

One Saturday morning towards the end of November, Sally woke to a dripping world, on which the rain not merely descended in sheets, but was driven at intervals, in howling gusts, against the windows. Outside, the garden was already a series of ponds, and the sea heaved sullenly on the horizon, its grey monotony of waters only broken

by the foam that seethed here and there amongst the rocks.

"Just our luck! No match, of course!" the hockey eleven was grumbling at breakfast, forgetful of all the holidays which had managed to be fine; and Sally, though she did not share their reasons for mourning, was none the less sad.

She had been planning a walk with Autolycus, and instead, she would have to spend the afternoon in a corner of the Fifth Form play-room, watching the rest of the class enjoy themselves. They had lately fixed up a ping-pong table, and were practising for a tournament; but no one had asked Sally or the Cat to join in the games.

When she entered her Form that morning, however, Sally's prospects changed, for she found on her desk an envelope addressed to herself, and inside, a card:

MISS CASTLE.

AT HOME.

Don't R.S.V.P. but come. 3.30. Games and Toffee.

It was obvious that Miss Castle had done as she suggested in the sanatorium last term, and was giving a toffee party. It was just the day for it, and Sally, looking round, wondered who else would be there, and whether they would spoil the fun by being nasty to her if occasion arose.

"I'd much rather have been alone," she muttered, and then felt slightly more cheerful as she heard Frisky shout, "Oh, hurrah! How decent of her," and realised that she was also to be one of the guests. There had been little malice about Frisky of late; instead, a toleration that was on the borders of friendliness; a very pleasant change from the beginning of the term, when she had seemed to share in Susy's enmity, and abet her efforts at causing annoyance.

"I wonder if Violet Tremson will be there as well," was

in Sally's thoughts; but Miss Cheeseman came into the room and there was no opportunity of finding out till the afternoon.

Sally arrived rather late (she felt strangely shy), and found the toffee-making already begun; but Miss Castle gave her the saucepan to stir, so she was soon seated on the hearth, comparatively happy, with something to do.

Frisky was acting taster—giving little screams as her fingers dived for sample pieces of boiling toffee which had just been dropped into a glass of cold water.

"Scrumptious!" she said. "It's just like glue." And when this description was received with laughter, she went on to try to say, "Sister Susie's sewing shirts for soldiers," with her mouth still half-full.

Sally looked round her and saw Violet Tremson on the sofa, with Doreen Priestly, and the fat good-natured girl—Decima Pillditch—who had been head of her dormitory during her first term, and was now a prefect, in the Sixth. There was no one there below the Lower Fifth, and Sally could not help thinking how furiously jealous Susy Cranstone would be when she heard of the party afterwards from Frisky.

Susy was in the Remove now—Miss Castle's own Form—but even with this advantage she had not, according to her own version, made much headway in capturing her divinity's affections.

"She hates me—I know she does—and I just do everything I can to please her and make her notice me," Susy had moaned the other evening, flinging herself on her bed. "I think I shall just go out and drown myself."

Frisky, to whom this confidence had been made, but loud enough for either Violet or Sally to overhear, had hardly been conciliatory.

"Don't expect she exactly hates you—just bored stiff with you," she suggested. "Why don't you be a little more cheerful with her?"

"I can't! I just tremble all over when she comes near. I really will drown myself soon, if she's so cold to me."

"In which case, she'd only forget you thankfully, wouldn't she?" Violet Tremson had said. And then, "Why are you such a sentimental ninny, Susy?"

Susy had been deeply offended, and after saying, "I wasn't talking to you, Violet," had relapsed into tears. Sally supposed there would be more tears that evening, for Frisky was not likely to keep silence about the toffee-party, especially if she had enjoyed herself.

The toffee cooked and put to cool, she and Sally, as the two youngest, washed up; and then the party, all formality and ice broken by the sweet-making, settled down to games. At first they were of the intellectual order, "Geography game," "Telegrams," and finally a strenuous "Alphabet List," in which, taking a certain letter, everyone present had to fill in examples that began with it opposite such items as, "a king," "a novel," "a character in Shakespeare," "a vegetable," "the first line of a song," etc.

One of the letters chosen was "A," and Frisky at once distinguished herself by putting down "'aricot" as a vegetable, while Sally made a great score with "Autolycus" as "a character in Shakespeare."

It was just the kind of game in which Sally's memory and instinct for amassing information scored, and, after Miss Castle, she came in a good second.

"Well done, Sally!" said her hostess with a smile, and there was a murmur of quite friendly agreement that made the object of their approbation blush.

Pleased at her triumph, she was also self-conscious, with a horrible feeling that her companions were secretly calling her prig.

"I've played it a good lot at home," she murmured, while Frisky, turning on her stool before the fire, said:

"Of course it's a great game, and all that, but isn't it jolly like a general knowledge paper?"

"Much too like—for near the end of term—I quite agree," said Miss Castle, with a twinkle in her eye. "For the rest of the evening we'll be frivolous. What shall we play?"

They played every kind of silly card game; and after tea, when they had finished the muffins, toasted before the fire, and cream buns from Parchester, they turned out the light, and collecting round the hearth, started on ghost stories. Miss Castle began with several, in order, as she said, to create the right atmosphere, and then Decima Pilldítch woke out of her sleepy silence, to describe an old man in eighteenth-century dress, whom her father had once seen, walking across a road, opposite their house, in the moonlight. Violet Tremson followed with one about a Scotch castle, and at last only Sally had made no contribution to the general store.

"It's your turn, kid," said Frisky, whose own tale had been very short, but so involved that she was quite cross for the minute at the number of explanations needed to make it even intelligible. "Perhaps they'll believe you."

"I'm not sure that I know a real one," said Sally, hesitatingly.

"Then make it up," said Miss Castle, looking at her with some curiosity in her eyes. "It will be quite different from ours, that are all second-hand."

"Buck up," said Frisky; and Sally, spreading her hands to the fire, began.

It was a tale of Parchester and Seascape Strand some twenty years back, about a boy, undoubtedly the chimney sweep in Kingsley's "Water Babies," who was wanted by the police for stealing bread. As the author warmed to her task, the boy, in his hunger and loneliness, became quite a pathetic figure, and it was evident his creator could see him, dodging across the heath amongst the gorse-bushes, and finally, as he learned that dogs as well as men were on his track, making for the beach, in the hope of sighting a boat.

"He descended to the shore at Borley Chine and be-

cause there was no boat, he went up into the caves and felt his way along the labyrinth of passages, hunting for a refuge."

"Where did he land up?" demanded Frisky. "In old—I mean Miss Cockran's study?" And she giggled.

"Shut up," said someone; and then—"Get on, Sally!"

"He didn't come up," said the girl, with a quick change in her tone. "Have you read 'Marmion,' where the nun and her lover were walled up? Well, it was like that—a lot of stones gave way, and the passage behind him got choked—the police and their dogs couldn't get at him—of course they didn't care to very much, for they'd have had to pay for his feed in prison and the workhouse."

"You mean he died there?" said Miss Castle.

"Yes—he's still there, along with the ghost of Miss Cockran's dog, that was lost down a rabbit burrow. And some nights (All Hallows E'en, and Christmas, for instance) you can see the light of his tallow candle that he had in a bottle, shining out through the Portholes, across the sea. He hadn't the courage to chuck himself down."

There was silence.

"How beastly!" said Frisky at last, in a subdued voice. "He may be prancing under this room now."

"But he was never real," said Miss Castle, smiling. "So we can all sleep happily in our beds without any terror. All the same, it was a good story. Sally, you should work it up for the Magazine."

"Shall I put on the light again?" asked Violet Tremson; and the whole party returned to playing cards until it was time to dress for supper.

Sally had enjoyed herself thoroughly. She was excited by her story-telling, and the general friendliness, so that she believed the wall of ice separating her from her companions was beginning to thaw. At seven o'clock the party broke up abruptly, for Miss Rogers appeared to tell Miss Castle that Miss Cockran had just had bad news—her mother was ill, and she had to go home at once.

"Just think of Miss Cockran having a mother," murmured Frisky to Sally. "Why, she must be nearly one hundred and one herself."

"Silly ass! She's not a bit old, really," said Doreen Priestly. "And look here, Decima, hadn't we all better say 'thanks,' and clear out quickly?"

They did so—except Sally—whom Miss Castle kept for a few minutes, to ask her something about her work. When she left, all the others had disappeared, save for a single figure whom she found studying the notice-board, in the long passage. Sally came up with her, saw it was Violet Tremson, and on impulse, as she recognised her, made up her mind to apologise for her past rudeness.

"Violet, can I speak to you a minute?" she said hesitatingly.

"Yes—what is it?"

The voice chilled her, and it was with an effort she went on.

"I . . . I want to say I'm sorry for all the times I've been hateful to you."

There was a pause, but the elder girl's face did not soften. "What has made you want to say it now—or rather, who? Miss Castle?" she asked, still coldly.

"No—of course not—it's just, it suddenly came to me, and I felt I must. I know I was an awful beast."

She would have gone on to excuse herself on the score of her disappointment the evening Peter did not appear, but Violet had already begun to move off.

"Don't bother to explain," she said, looking back. "I'm not worrying over anything you said. The fact is, I'm really quite indifferent to anything about you, because now I've got a good many friends here, and they are enough for me."

Sally stopped quite still. Violet's voice was cold and even, but it was not the snub she disliked so much as the sneer she felt concealed. Violet had not put it in so many words, but what she meant was surely:

"Why do you toady to me now? Just because I am popular, I suppose?"

Before she had walked the length of the passage very slowly, the younger girl was sure of this, and her cheeks flamed. Fear of it had been the only reason that prevented her from apologising during the last three weeks, and now that she had nerved herself to do so, she had been, not only scorned, but shamed.

She did not know that she exactly condemned Violet after the way she herself had behaved in the past. Perhaps her apology, at the moment, looked like toadying; but the bitterness of being suspected of it was almost endurable.

In silence she went up to her room, and found that Frisky, in pure friendliness of spirit, had arranged a booby-trap, of a wet sponge, over her doorway.

As it descended, it shot a stream of water right down her neck, but Sally scarcely noticed. Silently she picked it up, pulled her curtain across the entrance, and sat down on her bed.

"No offence meant," called out Frisky, in a disappointed tone; she had evidently expected a rise to her bait.

"All right—I don't mind—I wanted washing," responded Sally, making a gallant effort to be amused; but her voice was so flat that Frisky quickly turned her attention to Susy in the hope of better sport.

"My word! Toffee and cream buns and toast. Such a spread!" she said tantalisingly, "and if my hair is untidy at supper, and I get lines for it, I shall say it was all Miss Castle's fault."

"Why, she hasn't been stroking it, has she? I couldn't ever forgive you."

"No! you sentimental ninny, as Violet calls you; but we've been telling ghost stories, so now my back hair is going to stand permanently on end."

"Oh! Did Miss Castle tell one?"

"Rather! Several. I say, Susy, did you know there was a ghost of a little boy who was walled up and starved to

death, inside Borley Caves, haunting the cellar under this house?"

Susy gave a little shriek of affected alarm. "Oh, I shan't sleep at night. How lovely and horrible! Did she tell you that?"

"No—it was Sally's yarn."

"Then I don't want to listen," said Susy, in a high-pitched voice, evidently meant to carry. "It's sure to be rot, and Miss Castle would never have asked the little beast—only she's such a toady."

Frisky laughed derisively.

"You wouldn't have gone if you'd got the chance, would you, my darling? Oh no!"

At this point a quarrel threatened, and was only averted by Violet Tremson's peremptory order that both parties to it should stop talking at once.

Sally, who was still seated on the bed, remained there, with her hands clenched, repeating to herself what Susy had said.

"Toady!"—there it was again—only, while she didn't mind it from Susy, it was hateful from Violet.

She had almost persuaded herself by this time that Violet had really used the word in criticising her.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST

AUTOLYCUS GIVES TROUBLE

VERY few at Seascape House, certainly amongst the girls, had been aware of how much personality and influence Miss Cockran possessed, until her ruling hand was removed. While Peter's tongue had dictated her views to the general school public, it had been the fashion to ridicule the Headmistress as a funny old maid, out of date in her educational methods, and only to be obeyed because parents, having paid her their fees, would expect their

daughters to try to be patient—at any rate, up to a point.

Not all the elder girls and prefects, by any means, had subscribed to this view, and since Trina Morrison had departed they had more openly maintained that, far from being a back number, the Headmistress of Seascape House was a credit to her profession, and one of the school's chief assets.

"Wonder when she will get back—it is rot her being away now," Sally overheard a voice saying in the hall as she descended the stairs on the fourth day of Miss Cockran's absence. The voice was querulous, and to her surprise Sally saw that it was the usually good-tempered Decima Pillditch who was thus ruffled.

"Perhaps her mother'll die soon," said someone else hopefully, and then, at a shocked remonstrance from the group: "Well, of course, I only meant Miss Cockran would be able to get back quicker."

"Cheeserings is the limit," went on Decima. "There's that shopping party in Parchester, promised on Friday—approved by Miss Cockran and everything—and now her Royal Highness tries to pretend it shouldn't be done."

"Hush!" said another voice. "Here's one of the kids listening—take care."

Sally hurried on her way, trying to pretend she had not been eavesdropping, but really she had been held fascinated by the sudden realisation that prefects are not always in sympathy with those in authority. Decima Pillditch evidently disliked Miss Cheeseman, and the younger girl, who cordially shared this feeling, was pleased. When she arrived in Form, she told Frisky, in an undertone, what she had overheard, and Frisky nodded.

"Too much of the Cheesemonger, and we'd have a revolution," she said, with gloomy joy, and went away to whisper her views to someone else.

No revolution occurred, but it must be confessed that the atmosphere at Seascape House had suddenly become

strained. Everywhere, from the Sixth to the Juniors, there was an undercurrent of insubordination, and though the prefects did their best to hold it back, they were obviously half-hearted in their task—like an army employed by the State that is secretly in sympathy with the rebels. Miss Cheeseman, whatever her intention, was not a success as Deputy Head: she had too little sense of humour, and too much conscience in small matters. Insubordination, whether in the form of open defiance or some quite insignificant piece of mischief, she treated with the same rigorous repression, making martyrs of its perpetrators and grumblers of those who listened to their wrongs.

When Frisky Harrison had been sent to bed in the silence dormitory known as "Coventry" for jumping out from behind the gymnasium door to boo at one of her friends, and Cathy Manners of the Upper Fifth deprived of her privileges for eating sweets between classes, there was a general feeling that no one was safe.

"Why doesn't she send the whole school to bed at once, on bread and water?" said Decima, who was still ruffled, loud enough for some of the Juniors to hear. And though Violet Tremson stopped her with a quick: "Best take care, Pilladex," the warning was plainly given in sympathy with the prefect, and not with Miss Cheeseman.

Sally, with a great effort at self-control, avoided any conflict—accepting her Form Mistress's criticisms of her essay without the usual argument in favour of her own views—though on this occasion she would undoubtedly have found popular backing had she done so. It was her terror that if she annoyed Miss Cheeseman the latter would stop her usual walk with Autolycus, and with a beating heart she slipped out of the house that afternoon and went round to fetch him from the stables, where he usually had his dinner.

Fate was against her, for having found Autolycus and started towards the drive, she met Miss Cheeseman walking

towards her, with Jakes, the gardener. Since it was impossible to vanish into space, Sally smiled ingratiatingly, and tried to pass unnoticed; but with a movement of her hand the Deputy Principal stopped her.

"Where are you going, child?"

"I'm just exercising Autolycus—Miss Cockran always lets me."

Miss Cheeseman frowned. She had been told a great deal lately of what Miss Cockran did or did not approve, and even to her calm temperament it was somewhat galling.

"Indeed," she said coldly, "and where are you going?"

"Along the road, and then up the lane towards Tadiscombe Farm."

Jakes, who had been listening, and never liked to be shut long out of any conversation, now spat on his hands by way of introducing his remarks, and said:

"It's wildish country up there."

"What do you mean?"

"There do be a lot of poaching along them gravel-pits that b'long to Squire Pearson, and gypsy fellows, they say, about."

"I've never seen a gypsy, and I don't go in the gravel-pits," broke in Sally indignantly, and made an effort to pass.

"Stop, Sally," said Miss Cheeseman, firmly; "I daresay there are no gypsies, but I think it most undesirable that a child of your age should wander about the lanes alone."

"But I shan't be alone, I've got Tolly—he'd bite anyone who attacked me."

"Yes, Miss, and perhaps, it may be, anyone who didn't; skinned my fingers, he did, the last time I was washing him—the little mongrel!"

"It must have been your fault then," said Sally rudely. She disliked the gardener, who seemed to regard all schoolgirls as his natural enemies.

"Be quiet, Sally, and don't speak in that tone. Understand, I will not have you going out alone. Who is there that doesn't play games? Let me see——"

"I don't know." Sally looked very sullen. Really, she remembered the Cat quite well, and, to her annoyance, so did Miss Cheeseman. A passing Junior was ordered to find Catherine Dowl at once. In the meantime she began to talk about vegetables to the gardener, and Sally, after she had vainly tried to protest against the suggested companionship, was told to be silent and keep the whining Autolycus from walking on the beds.

Presently Catherine appeared, and Miss Cheeseman told her briskly that she and Sally Brendan might go for a walk as far as Tadiscombe Farm, but that they were not on any account to enter the gravel-pit, or wander from the road.

The Cat looked no more pleased with the suggestion than Sally had done.

"Must I go? Quantities of prep.," she mumbled, and was told that the right time for preparation was after tea. Next, it appeared, she had a cold coming, and had meant to stay indoors.

"It would be much better to take a brisk walk, than sit over the playroom fire," said the Deputy Principal firmly; she disliked the Cat as much as any of her companions, but had a secret theory that a little more regular exercise would make her healthier in mind as well as body.

"Now, no more excuses," she said at last. "If you have a cold, Catherine, you can go to Matron as soon as you get in, and I will tell her to give you a dose of cinnamon and another to-night."

Sally could almost have laughed at the Cat's expression, only she was so cross herself.

"Come on—it's no use arguing," she said in an undertone, and presently they set out.

"You'd better be back by 3.30," called Miss Cheeseman after them, but they pretended not to hear, and went on sulkily down the drive. When they reached the road Sally said:

"Look here, I didn't ask you to come, so it's not my fault—and you didn't want to thrust in, so it's not your

fault; and I don't see that we need walk together. I'll go in front with Tolly, and you do what you like."

The Cat nodded. She had been muttering all sorts of angry epithets about Miss Cheeseman ever since they moved out of earshot.

"I wish you had set the dog on her," she said. "Then we'd be quit of her for a bit. He looks as if he'd got sharp teeth," and she edged away. She did not like animals.

"You wouldn't mind if he was shot for doing it, I suppose?" returned Tolly's indignant mistress. (In her heart she had never quite parted with the ownership.) "Besides, she's so tough, I expect he'd die in the attempt."

Whistling to him, she set off at a brisk pace, soon leaving her companion far behind—and for a time thoroughly enjoyed herself—but when they reached Tadiscombe Farm her troubles began. Autolycus, it seemed, had not remained uninfluenced by the spirit of insubordination at Seascape House. Pulled out by sheer force from his favourite rabbit burrow, he barked indignantly at his mistress as soon as he was released, and made straight for the pond where a family of geese were disporting themselves.

There is safety in numbers, and the geese cackled so loudly, and made such a flapping with their wings, that Autolycus, to avoid them, hastily plunged through a hedge —but only to get into further mischief. To judge from the sounds that now ensued, there was a farmyard beyond the hedge, and by the time Sally, jumping a gate and crossing a field, had arrived there, all was in confusion. Pigs ran grunting, this way and that, hens flew cackling to the shelter of the barn, the farmer's wife, trying to head off the intruder, had stumbled and fallen, and now sat on some very dirty cobbles, clasping an empty basin.

"I'm very sorry—very, very sorry," said Sally. "You see he's only a puppy."

"He's a dratted nuisance," said the woman, "that's what he is. Made me spill all these scraps I was taking to

the hens, and I wouldn't be surprised if he'd killed one of them. You call him off at once, or I'll summons you."

Sally did not enjoy the next quarter of an hour—for it took her most of that time to secure Autolycus, now thoroughly ashamed and frightened—and the rest to pacify the farmer's wife, who, hunting among the hen-coops, appeared with a dead fowl, and claimed it as a victim of the raid.

"It looks more as if it hadn't had enough to eat," said Sally, who noticed it was very thin. "Perhaps it really died of sickness," but even her courage quailed before the storm this suggestion aroused. Her remark had certainly been unfortunate, and it was not till she produced *5s. 6d.* from her pocket and presented it that she was allowed to go, and then only with numerous threats of what would happen if her dog was seen again within the farm precincts.

"Come on, Tolly, you brute, but I'm sure you never touched that fowl," Sally said as she went, dragging him by her handkerchief through his collar, and coming to the gate of the field, she saw Catherine Dowl leaning against it watching.

There was a malicious smile in the corners of her eyes that roused the younger girl's anger to white heat.

"Move, and let me pass, can't you?" she said roughly, and the Cat did so, laughing in her silent way, with her lip drawn back to show her gums.

They walked home as they had come, Sally stalking in front with the now subdued Autolycus, and her companion plodding behind, with sunk shoulders and face turned to the ground.

At the gates Sally paused. "Come on," she said. "We'd better arrive together, or we may be tied hand and foot to one another for the rest of the evening, by way of punishment."

The Cat sniggered. "Don't let that beast of yours bite the gardener," she said. "He'd be sure to be shot then."

"What do you mean? He isn't going to be shot—he's

quite a good dog, only he's a puppy—and sometimes excitable."

Again the Cat sniggered, and Sally, stopping in the drive, said fiercely, "What *do* you mean? Speak out."

"Oh, I meant nothing—just I've never seen him before, except in the grounds, of course, until this afternoon . . . he hasn't been exactly good, has he—to-day?"

"I don't believe he ever killed the chicken, if you mean that?"

"You paid some money for it, didn't you?"

Sally was silent for a minute, then she shrugged. "Of course, you'd believe the worst of him you could—but at any rate it's none of your business, so go and drink your cinnamon."

The Cat did not appear to notice the gibe; only when they were parting at the front door she said, with a glance out of the corner of her slanting eyes, "You'd better be careful. If a dog takes to killing chickens, or sheep, I've always heard he can't be cured."

Sally did not trouble to reply. She had noticed the school clock said 3.25, and was determined to take Autolycus for a further run in the grounds before she went in to tidy for tea. It was a strenuous occupation, for Tolly was so thrilled over the numberless rabbit burrows along the cliff that he ran from one to the other, yapping wildly, and covering himself with the sandy mud he kicked up in clouds behind him. His mistress was quite thankful when she had restored him to the stables, and after bestowing an affectionate kiss on his black muzzle, she hastened into the house—her temper largely recovered.

"Sally Brendan, Miss Cheeseman wants you." One of the prefects caught her with this information as she was walking into her class-room for preparation at 5.30.

With a muttered exclamation of annoyance, the younger girl went to the Deputy Principal's study, and knocked.

"You wanted me?" she said briefly.

"Yes. Don't stand by the door as if you were waiting

to run away, but come here. I wanted to ask you what exactly happened at Tadiscombe Farm, this afternoon."

"What happened?" said Sally, in apparent amazement —trying to collect her wits. And then bitterly, "I suppose the Cat has been telling."

"If you mean Catherine Dowl, when she went to Matron for her cinnamon, she said enough about the walk to make Matron think it desirable that I should be informed."

"Cad!" said Sally, half under her breath, but sufficiently loud for Miss Cheeseman to grasp its significance.

"Hush, Sally—and remember Catherine Dowl has not blamed you, nor do I—for anything I have heard so far. I consider that dog far too undisciplined to be allowed out alone with anyone so young as you."

"Miss Cockran doesn't think so."

"Miss Cockran is not here."

The Deputy Principal's voice, up to this time, had remained fairly sympathetic; but now it became cold and detached. Bit by bit, she gained the story of the afternoon's adventure, and finally gave her verdict.

"Miss Cockran will, of course, decide as she wishes when she returns, but in the meantime, I do not consider it safe for the dog to leave the grounds at all, nor for you to take him for walks."

"But, Miss Cheeseman, he needs exercise—or——"

"That will do, Sally. Let there be no more argument. It is one of your chief failings."

Sally went out and slammed the door. She was called back, and shut it quietly; then stood making her most hideous grimace at it, only to find Miss Castle's hand on her shoulder.

"Oh, Sally, what an infant you are in some ways!" she said, and passed swiftly down the passage.

It was a galling comment—or would have been from anyone else—but the girl suspected underlying sympathy with her mood, and the heat of her anger cooled. After all, it was more the Cat than Miss Cheeseman who had played a dirty game.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND

AUTOLYCUS IS LOST

"Tolly! Tolly! Where are you, Tolly? Come here—good dog!"

It was Thursday afternoon, and Sally, unable to find Autolycus in the stables, was hunting for him up and down the gardens. Jakes, who was digging, paused and rested his hands on his spade to watch her. On his face was a wide grin.

"It ain't no use your calling of 'im, Miss," he drawled at last. "He ain't here."

"Not here? What do you mean? Tell me quick."

Sally's eyes were so tragic that Jakes's grin vanished, and he shook his head.

"It's what I said, Miss—he ain't here—must have runned away, and without his dinner too. I've never knowed him miss his dinner afore this."

"But you must know more about him than that. Tolly was so happy here, and so miserable before. I know he wouldn't run away."

The problem thus presented was too much for Jakes, who stood and scratched his head, in the intervals of shaking it.

"Dogs is queer kittle cattle," was all he volunteered. "But one thing I know, and it's this 'ere—it ain't no bit of use calling 'im: he'll come back when he wants to, and not afore."

He began to dig once more, and Sally fled towards the house, questioning anyone who she thought might be able to help her.

"Came after the dust-bins last night—greedy little beast!—that's all I know of 'im, for I drove him off, as Miss Cockran said to me—'Don't you feed him now—not extra, beyond his ordinary meals'—she says . . ."

Cook would have talked a great deal more, but the girl left her: there was a large household to cross-examine. Of

the maids, however, only one had any information to offer, and that was that she had seen Tolly running round the house early before breakfast; but wasn't sure if it might have been yesterday or the day before.

Impatient at such vagueness, the girl went up to Miss Castle's room, but she was out; while Miss Rogers, when tracked to the playing-fields, proffered no help beyond a little sympathy and the belief that Tolly was such a sensible fellow he would be sure to take care of himself.

"You don't think Miss Cheeseman has had him shot, do you?"

Miss Rogers began to laugh; then stopped, at the earnestness in the girl's eyes.

"No, Sally, I'm sure she hasn't. . . . What makes you think that?"

"Well, she doesn't like him, and now Miss Cockran's away, and——"

"Oh Sally! Sally! Do you think she'd give such a stab in the back as that—especially when she's very fond of Miss Cockran?"

Sally, with hands clenched to keep back her wretchedness, shook her head. "No, I suppose not . . . it was only an idea."

"Well, put it out of your head for a start. I've seen Miss Cheeseman feeding him with biscuits when no one was looking. . . . Now I must attend to the games, but I'll be sure and make inquiries, so don't lose heart. He'll probably come barking back to-night."

Dejected, but a little relieved that Tolly was at any rate not the victim of a plot, Sally wandered once more towards the school, and crossing the quadrangle, ran into Frisky Harrison, who greeted her with a shout:

"I say, do come and play squash—I've a new ball."

Sally shook her head. "I can't," she said, and was hurrying away when the other caught her by the arm.

"What's the matter—another row?" she asked sympathetically. "Old Cheeserings is the limit. Matron re-

ported me to her to-day for cheek, and here I am—'gated' —no chance of practising for the Form match on Saturday, and——"

"I'm very sorry," said Sally, pulling at her arm to free herself, "but I can't stop—Tolly's lost."

Frisky whistled—then ran after her. "Where? . . . How? Can't I help?"

"I'm going to look in the grounds—it's where he generally played, when he was allowed loose—out beyond the gardens, along the cliffs. Why . . . he may have . . . fallen over, even——"

Horror dawned in her eyes at the thought, but Frisky smote her on the back, "Not he, you ass. Don't go and get the jumps—he was much too cute—but look here, I'll come and help you, and we'll regularly beat the bounds."

"I . . . I thought you were 'gated.'"

Frisky dropped an eyelid. "From the playing-fields and shore, my child; but the garden was never mentioned. You run along, and I'll join you there in a jiffy, as soon as I've collected a coat."

They beat the bounds between them until it was nearly tea-time, and the evening shadows were beginning to roll up over the sky. Then at last, Frisky, looking round with a shiver, declared it was no use to hunt any more; but, even as she spoke, Sally, who was bending down by a gorse-bush, cried out:

"Come here quick! I'm sure I heard him bark."

The other ran over, and they knelt side by side, listening.

"There!" said Sally. "There! It's very faint, but oh, can't you hear it?"

"Sorry—but I can't."

Frisky gave another shiver. "Come on, old girl, do," she said coaxingly. "It's rotten bad luck, but I expect he's only gone into the town."

She stopped, for Sally was already running towards the house, and she saw her pause and speak to Jakes, who, spade in hand, had been watching them over the hedge.

Jakes shook his head several times. He was evidently not in an obliging mood; but finally he shifted his spade on to his shoulder, and came striding across.

"It's like this here, Miss," he was saying, as he approached. "It's a regular laby-rinth of burrows—that's what it is—down under this here field. If I was to dig at the mouth of every burrow that's fallen in, you might pay me wages for a month for doing it, and there'd be nothing to show for it at the end, I reckon, but rheumatism in my back."

He laughed at his own wit, and Sally broke in impatiently:

"I'm not asking you to dig at every burrow, but only at the one by the gorse-bush—I heard him bark just now."

"Did you, Miss?"

Jakes looked inquiringly at Frisky, and kneeling down, put his ear to the ground.

"I reckon I don't hear nothing," he grumbled, rising at last.

"See here, Missie, what's the good of my digging?"

"Please dig—you said you would. You promised. I heard him."

Silently, and without enthusiasm, Jakes fell to his task —Sally watching him intently—Frisky with backward glances at the school, where lights were beginning to show in the class-room windows.

"We've missed tea, and they're going to start preparation," she whispered. "Do come, Sally—we'll get in an awful row if we're late." But her companion did not even hear her.

After a minute's indecision, Frisky turned and ran back to the house: but instead of joining her Form at work she threw her coat on to a peg in the cloakroom, and knocked at Miss Castle's door.

Miss Castle was at work, obviously correcting preparation, for she had a pile of note-books heaped before her, and a red pencil in her hand.

"Well, Frisky," she said. "What is it?"

(Everyone except Miss Cheeseman called the girl by her nickname, instead of "Felicia," as she had been christened.)

"Oh, Miss Castle, I'm so worried about Sally Brendan. She has lost Tolly, and she thinks he's down a rabbit burrow, and is making Jakes dig for him, and I know she'll be late for prep.: and there'll be an awful row, and I can't get her away."

Miss Castle rose with a sigh. Since Miss Cockran went home she had had to answer a great many appeals for help, and it was not always easy.

"Where are they?" she asked.

"Out on the cliff . . . and oh, you won't be angry with her, will you? And it's not 'telling' my coming to you like this, is it? You see, if Cheese—I mean Miss Cheeseman found her, I know there would be a row."

"I understand," said the other briefly, picking up a small electric torch off the mantelpiece—and then she added with a smile:

"But what about you—you are late for preparation, aren't you? And have you had any tea?"

"No—you see while it was light we thought it best to go on looking, and then, I didn't like to leave Sally and——"

"Quite so. Well, you can tell the prefect in charge you were doing some work for me. Perhaps I'd better write a note."

"Yes, please. Most of them would think I was making it up. Thanks awfully, Miss Castle, and what work shall I do?"

Miss Castle, as soon as she finished the note, went to the cupboard, took out a plate with a cake on it, and cut some slices. "You'd better eat those," she said, "as quickly as you can," and snatching up her coat, disappeared.

By the time she reached the cliff there was a huge earth mound near the gorse-bush, and Jakes had struck work.

"It ain't a bit of good, Miss, and I wasn't paid to excavate—not by Miss Cockran I wasn't, even if it's her own dog."

"There's another way of getting him," said the girl, "and that's through the Portholes."

"What do you mean, Sally?"

It was Miss Castle, and Sally turned to her joyfully. "Oh, Miss Castle, I'm so glad you've come. It's Tolly—he's gone down a rabbit burrow, and the earth must have fallen in, and—I know what's happened—all these burrows lead to the cave where the Portholes are, and he must be there. . . ."

"I don't believe he's there, Miss, that I don't," said Jakes, and spat on the ground to mark his certainty.

"How do you know, Sally? What makes you say it?"

"I heard him—not a regular bark—but faint, with a whine. He must be starving and cold."

"Just himagination!" said Jakes; "that's what it is. . . . She's got a notion he's there, and so she heard him, but I never heard him . . . nor the other young lady."

"Where was it you heard him, Sally?"

Miss Castle went down on her knees as Jakes had done, and listened, while the girl watched her anxiously. At last she rose to her feet, with a sigh and shake of her head.

"I don't hear him," she said. "Perhaps you made a mistake."

"It were one of them sea-gulls—that's what it were—I be sure."

Sally withered Jakes with a glance. "It was Tolly," she said positively. "Do you think I wouldn't know? But we can easily see—there are the Portholes."

"Sally, we can't climb in at the Portholes—there's no way."

"But, Miss Castle, there is—I saw yards and yards of rope in the shed, the other day, and we can lower it over the cliff here. . . ."

"And me climb down, I suppose, for that there dratted

little dog, what ain't there—and should never 'ave been at all, to judge by his appearance."

Jakes was at last completely exasperated. "I'm not asking you to climb down," said Sally coldly, "only to lower me—I'm not afraid."

The gardener was about to retort angrily when Miss Castle put up a warning hand.

"We couldn't allow that, my dear," she said quietly, putting her arm round the girl's shoulder. "It would be risking your life, and that is more valuable than Tolly's."

"Riskin'? Throwin' it away, Miss! . . . look here——"

Jakes went close to the edge of the cliff, and dug with his toe at a projecting clump of grass and sea pinks. With a very slight effort he dislodged it, and several inches fell away, tumbling down on to the rocks below.

"That might be you, Miss," he said, and there was a pause.

Sally shivered and looked at Miss Castle. "I can't leave him there," she said; "I can't."

"We are not sure he is there," said Miss Castle gently. "He may be in Parchester. I'll ring up the police, and have him put on the Town Crier's list—but you must come indoors now."

Sally went quietly. It seemed as if her determination had suddenly collapsed. When she reached Miss Castle's room, she ate a slice of cake and drank some hot milk mechanically, and even smiled when her companion read her a comic piece out of one of the Juniors' essays. It was obvious, however, that her mind was far away.

"Thank you," she said at last, "thank you very much—I'll go and do some prep. now; may I say I was excused for the first bit?"

"Certainly, I've sent one note already for Frisky, so I may as well send another, I suppose, for you. But look here, child—I want you to try and not worry."

Sally's face was quite blank of expression. "I won't go out and hunt again to-night, if you're afraid of that," she

said wearily. "But I can't promise not to think of Tolly."

"No, of course not—but don't imagine he's dead . . . he may run in at any minute. I'll go out and call him again, the last thing."

"He's not dead at present," said Sally, "I know that—but I don't think it's any use your calling him. Thanks awfully for thinking of it."

She went out quietly, and shut the door.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-THIRD

THE PORTHOLES

The night that Autolycus was lost, Sally endured the uneasy sleep of a sick-room nurse, with spells of utter weariness and oblivion, broken by a return to real life, when visions of the puppy in various stages of exhaustion floated before her eyes. "Just himagination," she muttered, in scornful imitation of Jakes, and was glad that the school bell's noisy jangle at last allowed her to get up and dress. She was not hungry, and the sight of the plates at breakfast, heaped with large slabs of bread and butter, filled her with nausea, so that she longed to slip away to her classroom and pretend to be busy with her work.

It was an effort not to be rude in response to Frisky's well-meant efforts at consolation.

"Please don't talk of Tolly," she said at last, with a break in her voice, "I . . . can't stand it."

Frisky said "Sorry," gruffly, and relapsed into silence.

It was at this minute Sally overheard a piece of conversation that gripped her attention and held it fast. Decima Pillditch was talking to Violet Tremson across the table, some places up towards the Senior end.

"So, of course, I told her that Doris Forbes was leaving this term . . . (it is all right, she hasn't come down yet, so

she won't hear), and that, as she was both head of the school and games captain, it was simply up to us to do something handsome in the way of a present. I must say Cheeserings seemed to take that in all right—clucked approvingly, and all that; and then I rubbed it in that several of us ought to go into Parchester in consequence, and choose the thing."

"I wonder she didn't offer to do it herself," interposed Cathy Manners. "A dictionary, for instance, or some moral little tale, or Dryden's works, or——"

"Shut up," said Decima. "It's too early in the day to be funny. Anyhow, Cheeserings pursed up her lips, and blinked, and said: 'Which of you?' And I said—you and I, Violet and Cathy perhaps, if we held her by the hand, to be sure she behaves as becomes a Seascaper, and Edith Seymour, and other prefects—most of our crowd who play games, in fact."

"Well, and did she feel she could trust the prefects?"

"Not she, bless her! . . . not alone, in a town like Parchester," said Decima bitterly. "Why, we might run away, or go to the Pictures and bring back scarlet fever."

"Then I suppose the whole thing is off. Rotten, I call it!"

"No, it isn't all off. Do give me time to finish. I said 'alone.' She suddenly had a brain wave that Mademoiselle was taking Pat Dolby to the dentist this afternoon, and said we might all go with her, and while Pat writhes in the chair, we can be let off the chain to look at shops."

There were a few seconds' silence.

"I call it humiliating," said one of the prefects; "it's like holding Nanna's hand. I vote we refuse."

"Isn't that cutting off our noses to spite our faces?" asked Violet Tremson quickly. "We do want the present and it is the only way of choosing it."

"It's caving in to Cheeserings, though."

"Well, she can't help being like she is, or she would probably be different," said Violet, "and, after all, Miss

Cockran's mother's better, so she may be back any day. Don't let's be idiots."

She had lowered her voice to be audible only at her end of the table, but Sally had caught enough of the conversation for her purpose, and her mind was already at work constructing a plan. By the time she reached her Form, part of her cloud of depression had already lifted; but she was careful to conceal this from Miss Castle when, hanging about in the passage by her class-room door, at the middle of the morning interval, she was able to speak to her for a few minutes.

"Miss Castle . . . I . . . I suppose you heard nothing last night?"

"No, Sally, I'm afraid not—but I have telephoned to the police, and they have promised to look out for him."

Sally sighed, and looked very woebegone. "It's . . . it's the waiting about and doing nothing," she said.

"I know—but you must be brave, my dear—you have plenty of pluck. Do something to occupy your mind."

This was just the advice Sally had expected Miss Castle to give, and though she had angled for it, her expression remained half-sulky, half-weary.

"I can't play games this term . . . and . . . I just couldn't go for an ordinary walk leading nowhere, when I've always had Tolly before. . . ."

Her voice broke, and the tears came into her eyes. They were real tears, for she had suddenly remembered how Tolly would stand in the stable doorway, and look up at her, and bark—wagging his ridiculously long tail.

Miss Castle put her hand on her shoulder. "You mustn't give up hope like that," she said, and then Sally broke in:

"Miss Castle, some of the Seniors are going to Parchester this afternoon, shopping, and Mademoiselle will be with them, and Pat Dolby—going to the dentist—do you think I could go?"

"Why, Sally . . . I've 'phoned to the police, and even sent a notice to put up, and . . ."

"I know . . . and, of course, it doesn't matter . . . but I just thought it would be something to do with an object, and I wouldn't have to keep on thinking . . . thinking. Of course, if I'd better not——"

She had begun to turn away, when Miss Castle stopped her.

"It's quite a sensible idea," she said slowly. "I'll ask for leave if you like, and will you promise me, in return, that you will try and not worry?"

"Yes, Miss Castle."

Sally did not look at her very straight, but suddenly she caught hold of her hand, and wrung it hard.

"You have been a brick to me," she said, and fled.

It was hardly respectful, or after the custom of Seascape School in its behaviour towards those in authority, but Miss Castle seemed not to mind.

That afternoon, Sally, warned by a message to be ready at 2.15, was waiting on the front doorstep soon after the hour. She had her thick coat on, and a bag in her hand, and kept as much out of the prefects' sight as possible, for she guessed that her addition to the party would not be popular. As it happened, however, though Violet Tremson glanced at her keenly, no one else took any notice of her except Pat Dolby, who, from the folds of the muffler protecting her bad tooth from the air, mumbled suddenly:

"Sorry about the dog!"

Pat had always been one of her special persecutors, and Sally stared at her at first in surprise. Then she said gratefully, "Thanks awfully," and they were silent.

One on either side of Mademoiselle, they walked briskly into Parchester, while the prefects, in groups of two or three, strolled on ahead, obviously disdaining their company.

Sally, as they passed the various plantations of firs, thought of her moonlit expedition alone; and as they drew near to the spot where Tolly had first discovered himself to her by licking her hand, her breath came in a choke.

He had trusted her then, and she would not desert him now. It was horrid to deceive Miss Castle, but it couldn't be helped.

While she was still trying to justify herself to her conscience, the beginning of the tram-lines on the far side of the heath came in sight, and she could see that there was a tram just about to start. The Seniors had seen it also, and were running. Sally started to run too. She could hear Mademoiselle call to her to stop, but it was too good an opportunity for the escape she had planned, and, apparently deaf, she continued to race along as hard as she could.

When she was nearly alongside the step, the last prefect had already mounted to the top and disappeared; the conductor had rung his bell.

"Stop! . . . take me," called Sally, and putting on a spurt, made a jump. The conductor caught her and grinned. He was young and admired pluck.

"My! but you're some sprinter," he said. "Going on top with the rest?"

Sally shook her head; she had no breath left, and thankfully subsided into a far corner, undiscovered. When the tram arrived in the High Street, and stopped to let her companions dismount, she waited anxiously to see if they would remember or notice her; but to her joy they evidently believed that she had been left behind with Mademoiselle. Laughing and talking, they vanished into a big stationer's, and the tram shot on its way.

"'Ullo!" said the conductor, "not with the rest?" when at last, at the old City Cross, at the bottom of the town, Sally moved to the door. She shook her head, and was glad he did not seem to worry further about her; but it was with relief she heard the bell ring and saw him pass out of sight. There was only one more thing to be done now to avoid unwanted attention, and that was to dispose of her hat, with the Seascape band on it. In this she succeeded by thrusting it down to the bottom of a basket

of remnants, at the entrance to a drapery stores. Turning away, she took her old cap out of her pocket, and dragged it on over her eyes.

Now, unless she met anyone from the school, she was safe, and could start unhampered on her expedition—an adventure if ever she had had one—but different from all her other escapades in that no love of notoriety or excitement had led her to plan it.

"I must save Tolly."

That was her one idea, the slogan that inspired her to face the Borley Caves in the damp and dusk of a late November afternoon.

She did not waste more time in Parchester than she could help, merely pausing to make certain purchases that included a lantern, some candles and matches, a piece of raw meat, wrapped in a newspaper, a bottle of milk, and a small loaf of bread. As many of these things as she could fit in she thrust into the bag she had brought, and with the rest under her arm made her way back to the old City Cross, and took the tram labelled "Borley Chine."

It was still fairly light when she reached her destination and hastened away from the rows of lodging-houses, now half empty, down the zig-zag path, towards the pebbly beach. Beyond, lay the ridge of rocks and golden sands which had made the fortunes of Parchester and its neighboorhood during the last half-century.

Sally passed very few people, and they were all coming from the shore; going back, as she recognised, to family tea-parties, round comfortable fires. The thought made her shiver. It had been easy to boast, on a summer afternoon, that she was not afraid to make her way to the Portholes, but now it was all quite different. If it hadn't been for Autolycus, and the look of entreaty in his brown eyes that continually haunted her imagination, she would have turned straight back.

As it was, she climbed steadily over the pebbles, and up the broad slope of rock and shingle that led to the opening

of the largest cave. In the narrow entrance it was almost dark, and she paused, to take a last look at the misty landscape—with its deserted shore—and beyond that again at the grey-green sea, empty of any sail, tossing and turning in forlorn monotony.

"How horrible!" she said, though she usually loved the sea; and with hands that trembled lit her candle. Holding the lantern aloft, she surveyed the cave, into which a slit in the cliff admitted her.

It was a circular space, with long shafts of grey rock projecting here and there from the walls, like buttresses on the outside of a church. Water was trickling down them, and forming little pools, while tufts of fern and dank seaweed growths clung to the crevices and dripped.

"Like a vault," said Sally aloud, and jumped at the echo of her own voice, and again, as some bird flapped past her head, scurrying towards the open in terror at the unexpected sounds.

"I wonder which of us was most frightened," she said, and smiled without any amusement as, lowering the lantern, she crossed the cave and passed through the narrow doorway on the other side.

Here a passage began; almost overpoweringly damp and smelly, at times high like the vaulting of a church, at others so low that its dusty roof brushed and crumbled against her cap. Occasionally it widened out into a room, or else it turned, first at one sharp angle and then at another, until all sense of direction became lost.

Once the passage proved so stuffy that the candle, which had been burning low and dim, went out, and Sally had to grope her way until she came once more to a slit in the outer rock, letting in some light, and fresh puffs of air.

"I can't go on," she told herself, as she relit the lantern, "I can't"; but she knew that still less could she turn back, since she was even more afraid of the corners she had passed than of those that lay before her.

All the time she kept wondering where she was—near

the coast, she imagined, because she could often hear the monotonous thud of the sea on the rocks, though the gathering dusk hid it from her sight.

"I must be almost under the school," she muttered at last—"I've been stumbling along here for hours and hours. I think I'll begin calling Tolly."

But instead she screamed and then screamed again.

Almost on a level with her face, the lantern had shown her bright eyes staring at her from behind a ledge of rock: and in the same flash, her imagination had pictured the ghost boy she had invented in Miss Castle's room and then forgotten. Had she invented him? Mabel Gosson had given her the idea, that summer afternoon on the beach, and perhaps he was true after all.

Perhaps . . . but as Sally leaned against the wall, wiping her forehead and trying to keep herself from screaming once more, relief came. The eyes no longer stared, while the small grey body to which they evidently belonged scuttled down the ledge of rock and ran off, showing a patch of white to the lantern.

"A rabbit!" said the girl, and almost laughed, for here was her theory that the burrows were connected with the caves confirmed: and with that realisation came new courage and hope.

"Tolly!" she shouted. "Tolly! Tolly!" and went on calling as she moved forward.

As she mounted a heap of broken shale, a faint bark sounded in the distance.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FOURTH

RECONCILIATION

WHILE Sally was making her journey of exploration through the caves, she had felt as though hours passed: it seemed weeks before, at last, she found Autolycus. The whole thing was like some hideous game of "hunt the thimble," with feeble yapping, now so faint as to be scarcely heard, and then for a moment louder, to guide her, instead of music.

The passage had by this time widened, through an entrance half-blocked with crumbling shale, into a series of caves—some of which, it was obvious, must have been used in the past as a store-house. The walls had been roughly hewn to hold shelves, broken planks lay on the ground, while some empty barrels rotted in pools.

Sally, wriggling through the half-blocked entrance to the last cave on hands and knees, only noted these things with one half of her mind, the other and more active of her brain was intent on what was now an almost continuous whine—full of misery and entreaty.

"Tolly!" she called, "Tolly! Why don't you come?"

And at last, stumbling over an old iron anchor, almost buried beneath a mass of fallen rock, she came upon him—lying on his side—pinned down by a heap of earth and loose stones.

She knelt beside him, kissing him, and he lifted his head and feebly licked her hand, gazing at her with wide brown eyes that expressed their utter confidence in her ability to put things right.

"You are quite safe, Tolly," she whispered in answer, and resting her lantern on the projecting bar of the anchor, began feverishly to clear away the *débris* that weighed him down. At last he was free; but as she tried to lift him, he yelped, and examining him, she found his leg was hurt.

As gently as she could she raised him, and taking off her

thick coat, folded it up to form a cushion, and so made a bed for him in the driest part of the cave. Then she opened her bag, and producing a saucer and the bottle of milk, persuaded him to drink some. It was slow work at first, for the move had evidently jarred his leg, and he would do nothing but lie and whine, with his eyes shut. Gradually, however, he eased his position, and then, when he had taken a little milk, began to revive, and eagerly ate some pieces of raw meat that Sally chopped off for him with her pocket knife. His tail was wagging now, and there came at last something of his old roguish spirit in the cock of his long ears and gleam of his eyes.

"You think we are out of the wood, my lad," said his mistress rather ruefully. "It's well to have a trusting disposition," and with a little shiver she looked round the cave. It was very cold without her great-coat, though she was thankful she had had the sense to put on two warm woollen jumpers underneath as well as a thick scarf. Round her waist were folded coils and coils of rope; and Sally, as she began mechanically to unwind these, laughed, as she thought of what Jakes's indignation must have been when he discovered her theft.

Finding herself too early for the walk that afternoon, she had, on a sudden impulse, dashed round to the stable and outhouses, appropriating quite easily, since it was still Jakes's dinner hour, first a large clasp knife, that she had concealed in her bag, and then the rope, which she had hidden beneath her coat.

Would it be of any use to her? The answer seemed to depend on where she was, and as Autolycus slept—apparently exhausted—Sally lifted the lantern and began a voyage of discovery.

She was in a fairly large cave, not so damp as the one she called the entrance hall, but still in rather a ruinous condition—to judge by its heaps of splintered rock and earth. The roof, especially near the entrance, where she had scrambled through on her knees, must always have

been weak, for previous visitors—presumably smugglers—had propped it up with pit-poles, and stretched a pine trunk across, that now sagged ominously over the doorway.

At the opposite side, where she had found the dog, there was a wide fissure in the rocks, filled with earth and rubble. Here the roof sloped so violently that the girl, approaching to examine it, jumped back in dismay as she realised its spongy insecurity.

"Why, it might come down any minute: it might have come down and buried Tolly and me while I was bending over him," were the thoughts that shook her nerve, and turned the caves, not merely into a place of shadowy fear, but of active, lurking danger.

Her candle had now burned very low, and Sally, while she replaced it with another—her fingers trembling as she forced them to do her will—was struck by a fresh thought. Where did the air come from that had nearly extinguished her light, since the wall against which she leaned seemed solid like the others?

Smothering the glow from the lantern with her bag, she peered about her in the dark, until, her eyes growing accustomed to the gloom, she was able to distinguish some kind of opening, a few feet above her head. A wide opening it must be—no, two—for a broad line of shadow was thrown across the cave, in the middle; and then Sally's heart gave a leap. She had reached the Portholes: and was quite close to Seascape House, if only she could make anyone hear her and come to her assistance.

Lifting the light again, she moved her hand along the wall, wondering how she could raise herself to look out—for it was no use shouting while she was in a kind of well—and then, suddenly, Autolycus whined. It was not the whine of pain, but had an undercurrent of growl in it, and Sally, as she turned back from her search, and put her hand on his back to quiet him, could feel that he was tense with excitement.

"He's heard something," she said. "Someone is coming."

Her first feeling was one of joy, for the loneliness and growing sense of insecurity had begun to tell on her nerves, and she was very near tears. Then, as she listened, conscious that there were indeed movements somewhere down the long dark passage by which she had just come, her hope turned to fresh terror. What human being could it be that visited the caves at this hour of the night? No one knew where she was—(how Sally wished, in that minute, that she had left a note for Miss Castle to explain her plan)—smugglers were an order of the past—there was no one . . . no one except . . .

In a flash, there forced itself back into her mind the tale she had deliberately shut out earlier in the afternoon—of the boy who, wandering like herself from Borley Chine, through the labyrinth of passages, had been walled up and starved. In her excited mood he was no longer the hero of a ghost story, but a reality; and drawing a choking breath, she crouched down by the dog, and placing the bag in front of the lantern to hide its light, flattened herself against the wall.

"Quiet, Tolly!" she whispered. "Oh, do be quiet!" But he continued to growl softly, and the footsteps—for she knew they were footsteps now—to draw ever closer.

Of the next few minutes Sally had never any clear recollection. Someone shouted—shouted several times—there was a flash of light, and a sound of falling masonry, mingled with loud barking—and then the pain in her head, which had caught her sharply in the first spasm of fear, became intense and she knew no more.

When she opened her eyes, it was to see Violet Tremson staring down at her—a Violet almost as white as the handkerchief with which she was sponging her forehead.

"The ghost!" Sally gasped; and then, "Where am I?"

"I . . . I think we are underneath the Portholes——" Violet's voice was very unsteady, and the tears had begun to trickle down her face.

"I . . . I thought you were dead when I found you," she

said, and then the other, in sudden reaction, sat up and laughed.

"It was you who killed me. . . . I imagined you were the ghost—my ghost," she said; "and I suppose I fainted." She shivered.

In an instant, Violet was on her feet and taking off her own coat.

"You are to put this on at once," she said, and there was so much authority in her tone, and the younger girl was so cold, that she meekly obeyed. Her brain was working furiously now: she had begun to wonder how on earth the other had found her, and why she had come.

"I . . . don't understand," she began, but Violet, with a frown, only said—"Presently." She had a soft plaid rug that she wound round her own shoulders, and tied under her arms. This done, she opened a wide rush basket, and began taking out first a huge thermos, and then some buns in a bag.

"Coffee," she said, and pouring some into a mug, made Sally drink from it, afterwards drinking herself.

"Now we shan't get chilled straight off, while we make plans," she said. "And there's more left if we want it. Feel better?"

"Lots, thank you. It was just the fright and finding Tolly hurt."

Violet nodded, and turning the lantern towards the dog, began to feel his leg, with gentle, capable fingers—while he whined softly, and tried to lick her hand.

"I think it's broken," she said at last. "Not badly—but it ought to be set—I wonder where we could get a splint."

She got up from her knees and began to look, and Sally, as she flashed the lantern round the cave, gave an exclamation of horror.

"The door!" she said. "Why, it has fallen in."

"I know—it nearly fell on top of me, because my electric torch went out, and in the dark I caught the rug round one

of the props, as I scrambled through, and pulled it too hard trying to get it free. That's what made me so funky and shaken—that, and finding you, as I thought, dead."

She gave a thin little laugh, without much mirth in it, and went to pick up the broken prop.

"A bit of it might do, if I had a decent knife," she said, and gave an exclamation of joy, as Sally produced the gardener's out of her bag.

"You really have the pioneering instinct, Sally, and you ought to emigrate. Imagine thinking of a knife! And I suppose you brought that coil of rope."

The younger girl nodded shyly. "You ought to be a prophet," she said. "Or the Delphic oracle person. How did you know I was here?"

Violet flushed. "Well, I didn't. But I guessed when we met Mademoiselle in the High Street with Pat Dolby, and she thought you were with us, and I knew you hadn't been. She was in an awful state about you."

"Poor Mademoiselle! She's very nice most times, isn't she? But so excitable."

"Fireworks weren't in it," said the elder girl placidly. "Anyhow, while they fired, I went round quietly and borrowed all the money the others had got, so as to get the thermos, the rug and coffee. I told them to tell her (when she allowed them to speak) that I knew where you were, and would bring you along—and just vanished."

"But how did you know?" persisted Sally. "I never told you anything."

"Frisky did—I mean about your thinking the dog had got into the caves: then I remembered your ghost story about the Chine, and put two and two together. You said, out there on the cliffs, it was the only way to get him."

They were silent, while Violet measured the stick. Afterwards, with Sally holding the lantern, she set Tolly's leg as well as she could, and fastened it to the splint, binding it up with her school tie and hat-band.

"Now he's got the colours," she said, "and I know he'll

deserve them—the darling—for he is wagging his tail, although I hurt him."

It was true. Tolly had whined a little while the operation was going on, but now he was evidently satisfied that what had been done was intended for his good, and when Violet bent over to kiss him, he licked her face—then looked up at them both expectantly, and barked.

"He now imagines," said Violet, "that we will waft him back on a magic carpet to his stables or the vet., and how is it going to be done, kid?"

Sally turned and looked at her with a start. "I don't know," she said absently. "I was just thinking—why did you come, Violet? You . . . you hated me."

"No, never," said Violet quietly—and then, "Sally, do you want me to have to apologise for what I said the other day?"

The younger girl stared. "I . . . I loathe apologies," she said, "and why on earth should you? I had been beastly to you several times, and you had a right to snub me; only, that evening when I apologised, I wasn't toadying, you know—really, I wasn't—it was just I had been so happy with you all, and Miss Castle, and I wanted to make things straight."

"Yes—and then I went and damped all your happiness down, and was a sanctimonious liar, and said I hadn't minded what you did. I could have kicked myself that night."

Violet had risen to her feet, and was walking backwards and forwards, with more emotion in her pale face than Sally had ever seen there before.

"It's all right, Violet," she said awkwardly. "Don't mind like that. I've been much ruder to you than you ever have been to me. Let's just forget it all."

Violet laughed. "It would be the simplest thing to do, but one's got to have some kind of an explanation. I liked you from the first, kid—I don't know why—(certainly not from Cousin Alice's description)," she added, with a

twinkle, "but just because, I suppose, one falls into friendship as into love."

"I know," said Sally, nodding; "as I did over Peter—only I've fallen out again, as you said you did."

"Exactly—and then, though I liked you, it was obvious you didn't like me—and that wasn't your fault, and I didn't blame you till you asked me that afternoon if I had no pride. It got me on the raw, because I suppose I hadn't any pride, the way I had pursued you."

"No! no! no!" said Sally, protesting. "It was beastly of me, but I felt so ill and horrible that afternoon, I wanted to say something to hurt somebody." And she began to talk about her sprained foot, and Roger having seen Peter at the party.

While she spoke there came the sound of a faint whistle, and Tolly started to bark.

"It's from outside," said Violet. "Perhaps they've guessed we are here. Now, how on earth are we to let them know?" And she and Sally gazed up in silence at the three feet or more of rock between them and the Portholes.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIFTH

RESCUE

It was Sally who first discovered the way up to the Portholes—steps, or rather notches, cut in the side of the rock, into which it was possible to put one's feet—and then, as she mounted these, with Violet supporting her from below, her hand came suddenly into contact with a chain and rings, suspended from the wall above. Evidently the chain had once been longer, but was now broken. By grasping it, she was able to pull herself up until she could place her knee on the lower ledge of one of the Portholes, and crouching there, look out, and down.

"Hi! Hi!" she screamed excitedly, and taking the

lantern from Violet, waved it backwards and forwards, across the opening.

Instantly there was an answering shout, and she saw the flash of an electric torch.

"There are several of them," she said, and then—"Oh, one of them is Jakes. Mustn't he be mad at having to come and find Tolly here, after all?" And she giggled.

"Do him good," retorted Violet. "But I say, move along if you can, and I'll come up too. I wonder who the rest are?"

"Miss Castle, for one—of course—I bet."

And then Sally gave a shout of joy. "It is Miss Castle! Oh, hurrah, Miss Castle, I've found Tolly." And she put her hands together to make a megaphone.

The little group on the shore below was drawing nearer, and finally mounted to the ledge of rocks below the barbed wire, where Sally had once eaten her tea, and contemplated climbing up. Their expressions, seen in the fitful moonlight, were anxious, and when she waved her arms, Miss Castle stepped forward, and told her to be careful.

"Are you there too, Violet?" she asked; and as the elder girl said "Yes," she answered "Thank God!" so fervently that they both felt rather abashed—realising the anxiety they had caused.

"Would it be easier to return as you came, or try to get down from where you are?" demanded another voice.

"Proggins!" whispered Sally; and it was indeed Miss Rogers, in her gym. dress, while beside her was Jakes, staring at them in too much consternation to find his usual flow of words.

"We can't return as we came, Miss Rogers, the door of the cave has fallen in, but Sally has got a rope."

"My rope! Well, if I ain't blowed! I knew one of them girls had stole it," said Jakes, suddenly aroused from contemplation; but Miss Rogers allowed him no time to develop the grievance.

"HI! HI!" SHE SCREAMED EXCITEDLY

"Will it be strong enough to hold their weight—properly tied?"

"Should hold six of 'em," he muttered sulkily, and Violet, feeling her way down by the notches, picked it up, and reappeared with it.

"I'm quite good at knots," she said to Sally. "Isn't it fortunate I was a Guide? We will fix it on to the chain. See?"

They did so, and let it hang down over the ledge, but only to find it could not reach within arm's length of the group below.

"Oh, dear!" whispered Sally suddenly. "Oh, dear!" Her excitement had died down, and she felt cold and miserable. A minute ago they had seemed in safety, and now it was as far off as ever.

"Courage, Sally!" called out Miss Castle, guessing dejection in her attitude. "Jakes will fetch his long ladder, and then we shall reach you quite easily. What about Tolly?"

Autolycus, in truth, had begun to bark, and then whined with pain, as he tried to drag himself on to his feet.

"I will put him in the rush basket, and tie it up in the rug, and then we will lower him first," said Violet. "But please take care, for he has broken his leg."

She felt her way down once more into the cave, and with the aid of Sally's belt, the rug and two handkerchiefs, made as comfortable a cradle as she could devise. Inside it she placed Autolycus, and steadying him with her hand, helped the other girl to pull him up on the ledge beside her.

The need of quieting him steadied Sally's nerves once more.

"Poor old Tolly! Lie still, sir!—no, lie still!" she whispered firmly, and held him tight in her arms till Jakes appeared with the ladder and some of the more intrepid of the kitchen staff, wrapped up in dressing-gowns and shawls.

It was an audience to be impressed, and the gardener, as he cut the barbed wire and placed the ladder against the

sloping rock above, prepared to arouse applause and fear.

"'Tis a risky job, I would have you ladies know," he said, beginning slowly to take off his coat, and then Miss Rogers unkindly laughed.

"Mine be the risk," she said. "You and two of the others just hold the thing still," and she ran up the rungs as though she were climbing in the gymnasium. Balancing herself on the top, with one hand on the rock, she called to Violet:

"Now quick! Lower the dog," and Tolly, tied up as though he were a workman's dinner, was first suspended in space, howling miserably, and then landed in Miss Rogers's arms.

The ladder creaked against the cliff side, shifted on the shale, and was firmly propped up once more by the cook and Jakes, while Miss Castle, advancing, took the bundle, freed it from the rope, and proceeded to comfort its unhappy occupant.

"Next man! . . . it had better be Sally," called Proggins, and Violet, when she had helped her out of the big coat, fastened the rope under the younger girl's arms.

"Good luck, Sally!" she whispered. "It is absolutely tight and safe. Just remember, if anyone asks, that I gave you leave to come to the caves and search."

"But you didn't!" Then, catching sight of the other's face, which had a strained look about the eyes and mouth, "Oh, right oh! If you like—though I don't see that it matters. But I say, have I got to lower myself now?"

"Yes—push off gently with your feet, while I hold the rope across my knees, to break the jerk. That's right."

It seemed to Sally that she shot into space—was nearly cut in half by a sudden pull under her arms, and then, just as the pain seemed unbearable, felt her feet on something solid. Miss Rogers was placing them on the top rung of the ladder.

As soon as the rope was unfastened, she descended step

by step, until she fell in a little heap on one of the rocks, where someone had spread a rug. Her legs would support her no longer, and she felt ashamed of this weakness, until Miss Castle smiled, and gave her Tolly to hold, and Miss Rogers said approvingly:

"Good girl! You kept your head all right. Now for Violet."

"It ain't going to be an easy job for her—not nohow," said Jakes, loudly. (He had been silent a surprisingly long time.) "It's like this here—there ain't no one up there to stop the rope being cut against the cliff, soon as her weight comes on it—at least, that's as I see it."

"Yes," said Miss Rogers, "I realise that." Her face had gone quite white, but her tone was even and detached as she called out, "Put your thick coat, doubled, along the ledge, Violet, for the rope to come across."

The girl did so, and crouched, hesitatingly, on the ledge. She too had evidently realised the risk.

"I'm not going to try to tie myself up," she called out at last. "It will be safer hand under hand—as we do in gym.—not such a jerk."

Miss Castle gave an exclamation of horror, and Sally struggled to her feet, protestingly, but Miss Rogers turned and frowned at them both.

"Quiet!" she said abruptly, and then louder, so that the girl above could hear her, "Much safer, I think. I'll hold the rope steady—lower yourself slowly."

Sally will never forget—nor probably will any of the other watchers—the sickening anxiety of the next few minutes. First, the awful jerk as Violet's full weight swung out from the ledge of rock, and then her slow descent, hand under hand, with knees tight gripping the rope, until Miss Rogers could grasp her. She remained for some seconds, with her head bent over the ladder, and when she had descended a few rungs lower, Jakes put up his arms, and lifted her down.

"She's a rare plucked 'un, she is," he said. "Scraped

her fingers and knees something awful—and never a squeal."

For once he had no grumble or criticism to make.

"Oh, I'm all right," said Violet, feebly; but she put her hands behind her back as Sally looked at her, and let Miss Castle and one of the maids support her towards the steps.

Miss Rogers picked up Tolly and smiled at the younger girl.

"Violet will be all right before long," she said. "It's only she has scraped herself rather badly, and it was a nasty kind of climb to tackle. I must say you are a pair of scamps, though—both of you."

"It wasn't Violet's fault, but mine."

Proggins smiled. "It's not my place to scold either of you now," she said. "But if I were you, I should lay the blame on Tolly when questions are asked. Now, don't talk any more. Here are Matron and Mademoiselle waiting for us at the steps, and they will help you up to bed."

Once more Sally slept in the sanatorium, and again because she had broken bounds. At first, the likeness to her previous stay there did not strike her. She was so cold and tired that her only thought was to snuggle down amongst the clothes, with a hot-water bottle, and drink the milk that was brought her as fast as she could.

"Are you sure Violet is all right?" she had demanded.

And Matron answered—"Tired out, like you, but she'll be right as rain to-morrow. Now go to sleep and don't think any more about things. Miss Castle tells me to say she is seeing to the dog." And then the lights were put out.

She did not sleep long: for, with a nightmare jerk, she sat up, saying the words, "I shall be expelled," and found herself trembling all over. Of course she would be expelled, for in spite of her promise to Miss Cockran last term, she had run away. It was true she had not, this time, set out deliberately to break school rules for the fun of the thing; but nothing could do away with the fact that once she had begun to think of Tolly she had thought of no one else.

While she sat—still upright—considering the enormity of her offence another horrid thought came to her: Would Violet Tremson be expelled too? Expelled just because she had gone to a friend's rescue—not a friend's,—but to help someone who had been persistently horrid to her?

Sally turned over, and hid her face in the pillow, but she could not be still. She was hot now—and not cold. Getting quietly out of bed, she put on her slippers and dressing-gown and stole to the door. Perhaps she could find Violet before she fell asleep, and talk things over.

Violet had said, before she let her down on the rope, to remember she had given her leave to go to the caves, and she had wondered why at the time; but now she realised in a flash—it was to take part of the blame, and that couldn't be allowed, of course.

As she opened her door she saw there was still a light in the passage, so it could not be very late—besides, the servants were talking downstairs. Beyond the head of the stairs there was a door ajar that might be Violet's.

Closing her own door to avoid suspicion, she pattered quietly along and peered into the half-open room. Yes—there was Violet, propped up against some pillows. Sally could see how white her face was, but what struck her next, with a quick stab of horror, so that she forgot everything else, was the bandaged hand, suddenly raised to her head.

"Oh, Violet!" she said. "Violet! I can't bear it. Are you badly hurt?"

"No, Sally, I'm not—but do go back to bed at once."

Violet's tone was urgent, and the younger girl, turning abruptly at its note of warning, saw on the hearth-rug—not Matron, as she had expected—but Miss Cockran.

"You!" . . . she said. "It's you, Miss Cockran."

"Yes, I have returned," said Miss Cockran quietly. "But why have you come in here, when you were told to go to sleep?"

She closed the door as she spoke, and going over, took

Sally's hands between her own. Her voice was grave—but not so stern as the culprit expected—and Sally suddenly, for no reason at all that she could afterwards remember, burst into tears.

"Tolly's safe," she sobbed, "and I'm so sorry, and it's all my fault. Violet never gave me leave—she just came to help me."

Miss Cockran had drawn her by this time down on the bed, with Violet's eiderdown over her legs, and her own arm round her.

"Perhaps you had better tell me everything," she said, with a look at the girl's flushed face. "Only then, you must go to sleep."

The story was told piecemeal, chiefly by Violet, and when it was finished, and Miss Cockran remained silent, the elder girl broke in:

"Please don't expel Sally. It wasn't naughtiness."

"It was disobedience—an offence against discipline," said the Headmistress quietly.

"It was saving life."

Miss Cockran nodded. "I know that—but it's not a first offence. You begged me not to expel Sally, as well as Trina Morrison, at the end of last term, Violet . . . and I listened."

"Did you, Violet? I didn't know. . . . I have been a pig to you——"

Sally could not resist the interruption. Now she knew why Violet had been to Miss Cockran—not to sneak—but to save her.

"Violet is a treasure," she said. "She's wonderful, isn't she?"

The elder girl grew red, and muttered "Oh, rot!" while Miss Cockran smiled.

"She has been a good friend to you, Sally; but she can't save you from your own wilfulness. You are not a good influence to have in a school."

Sally hung her head, while Violet said, "She will be, if

she stops; and you don't mean to expel her, do you, Miss Cockran?"

The Headmistress rose, and bending suddenly, kissed the younger girl.

"No!" she said. "Subject to real amendment, not pie-crust promises, I don't mean to expel either of you. After all, I'm very fond of Tolly, and he is my dog—and I'm proud of the courage you both have shown. Now Sally, back to bed with you—and sleep."

They were neither of them expelled. Autolycus was, but as his leg recovered completely, and he went to live at Violet's home, where rabbiting was easy, and not dangerous, he did not seem to mind. Perhaps he missed the society of Sally and Miss Cockran; but the loss was fully compensated by not having Jakes to bath him every week.

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